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PROBLEMS THAT PERPLEX

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REV. J. W. G. WARD



# PROBLEMS THAT PERPLEX

BY

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PROBLEMS THAT PERPLEX. I

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TO  
MY WIFE

COMRADE IN DIFFICULTY  
COMFORT IN DISTRESS  
COUNSELLOR IN ADVERSITY



## PREFACE

MANY conversations with men of all shades of belief and unbelief have led one to the conviction that a spirit of earnest enquiry about religious questions is abroad. Far from being indifferent to the claims of Christianity, there are people who, pondering some of these problems that perplex, are truly anxious to find the way of life and peace. And while it is impossible within the compass of this volume to deal adequately with every phase of doubt, one sends this book forth with the earnest hope that it may, in spite of its imperfections, be a finger-post by which the wayfaring man may be directed on his travels in search of truth.

One has purposely eliminated technical terms as far as possible, that, written in the language of the people, it may be of service to them in their quest of the Eternal.

J. W. G. WARD.

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PROBLEMS THAT PERPLEX

*“Truly, a thinking man is the worst enemy  
the Prince of Darkness can have.”—CARLYLE*

# PROBLEMS THAT PERPLEX

## I

### THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

THE sword hung over the unhappy head of Damocles as he sat at the king's table. And though every conceivable dainty was set before him on platters of gold, he had no appetite for the feast nor interest in the gay throng about him. He could not change his place, nor could he banish the thought of that weapon, suspended by a single hair. At any moment, the glittering blade might crash through his skull, and dread filled his soul.

In one way, we are in a similar situation. No matter how we try, we cannot escape for long from the thought that over our heads hang, like a sword of destiny, pain and its dark problems. Man's mind in every age has pondered the mystery of suffering. And because it is a constantly recurring factor in human life, we too have asked many a time, Why should agony of mind and body seem to be the inevitable accompaniment of human life? From the lips of psalmists, prophets, and seers, the question has been wrung as they have looked on the suffering of the race, and often in these days, with voices choked by emotion, with hearts torn by anguish, the question is repeated. It is such a vital

matter that, to some, faith seems well-nigh impossible. This may be the best of all possible worlds, as the philosopher says, but frankly many of us cannot believe it unless more than a glib statement is given to us as the basis for such a belief. Faith is at stake!

Briefly put, the matter seems to resolve itself into this: We are assured that the world is ruled by a Supreme Being who is wise, powerful and good, and that we, His offspring, are the objects of His loving care. That is the Christian position. But there is another side of the matter to which we cannot be blind. The world is full of suffering. Some of it we can explain; it is the result of natural causes. But for much there is no apparent explanation, and it looks as though we were driven to a position like this: Either God can prevent pain and does not—therefore He is not love; or God cannot prevent it—therefore He is not all-powerful.

But is that the only way in which the problem can be expressed? Assuredly not. We can as reasonably say: God is all-powerful; God is all-loving. If, therefore, He permits pain there must be some result He has in view that cannot be obtained in any other way. There is a significance in all man's sufferings, whether they be caused directly or indirectly. This is the point we shall endeavour to prove.

#### ALL PAIN IS NOT PUNISHMENT

This is a fact that Jesus plainly teaches, though, of course, some pain can be traced to wrongdoing and is, in a measure, retributive. Let us deal with

this aspect of the matter first. Sin causes suffering to the delinquent, and very often the penalty is paid by the physical side of man. It is perfectly true that some evil acts affect the body more than others, but even non-bodily sins, like greed, envy, ill-temper and jealousy, though primarily affecting the mind, may react upon the body and not only induce nervous ailments, but actually cause a predisposition to other ills. While the drunkard and the roué reap the harvest they have sown, so do those who are guilty of more respectable sins. Thus it is a well-grounded fact that some pain is punishment for the breach of physical and moral laws.

It is quite evident that this was the view of Christ's disciples when they put that question to Him about the man born blind. "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" It strikes us at once that unless we admit the possibility of pre-existence or transmigration of souls, this man could not have sinned before his birth, and whatever the theory held by the disciples, Jesus ruled it out by His reply. In the case of this man, at any rate, pain was not punishment, for he was not guilty! Then that implies that while some pain may be the direct result of sin, and therefore may be called punishment though it is not inflicted by special mandate, some pain may be suffered though the individual is innocent of any offence, moral or spiritual.

Yet undoubtedly some suffering is due to heredity. Though in this case it did not apply, for Jesus denied that either this man or his parents were guilty of sin, that does not make the law of heredity inoperative. We know in only too many cases that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children, and that many a

pang that tortures the human frame, and baffles medical skill, is but the fruit resulting from a sowing by other hands long ago. This gives rise to much pessimism and perplexity. Some can see no hope for the race when the innocent thus suffer for the guilty, and when there is no apparent intervention on the part of God to alleviate the ills that men have to endure through no fault of their own. Is there, they ask, any benevolent Deity behind it all, or only blind Fate? The gibes of the unjust, the scorn of the sceptic as he looks at the established order might be passed without much heed, but we dare not treat every objection in that way. When earnest and devout souls, brooding over earth's misery and mystery, lay down the tangled skein they have wearily tried to unravel, we must reason the matter out.

When one sees the weak that might have been strong but for another's sin, when torture and deprivation are the portion of some children instead of merry laughter and happy play, it makes one think seriously about this law of heredity and its terrible entail. Our life-work may bring us in contact with many a gruesome fact. One has worked in the hospitals of France and of Britain, and has seen some of the horrible fiendishness of war. But one was never more appalled by the sight of suffering than when one stood by the cot of a little child, dying of a loathsome disease, its frail body racked with pain. The cause was its father's sinful ways. And have we not all come across cases of the mentally deficient, the crippled and the blind, whose suffering has been real enough, but whose parents alone had sinned? Even where there is no bodily pain, there



is the sorrow and the shame that another's sin may bring with it.

In common fairness, however, we must admit that there is the other side to heredity. God means it to conserve the good and to pass on a heritage of health and happiness that could be obtained in no other way. How many blessings we now enjoy have come to us along the rails laid down by heredity? Some of us cannot but thank God for the fathers and mothers who made the home into which we were born, and who implanted in our hearts a love of things beautiful, noble and pure. If man by his folly wilfully breaks a law thus beneficent in its operation, the responsibility is not God's, neither is He proved to be unmindful.

The greatest difficulty, however, that the problem of pain presents is that of untraced pain, illustrated in the case of the man to whom Christ's attention was called. If he had not sinned, nor his parents, then who had? Christ does not supply an easy answer to the question put to Him. As a matter of fact, the disciples were aware that if their two possible explanations were incorrect, the solution was beyond them. Yet note the position Christ adopts. He admits that sin causes suffering to the wrong-doer, and that sin causes suffering to others who may be innocent. But there is another phase of suffering to which He assigns no cause; it is pain that God permits, and which man can explain only in part. There may be causes, but they are so far back that man cannot lay his hand on them; and there are accidents that man may have been able to foresee, but which he has been unable wholly to avert. We venture to say that it is mainly the accidental and

the inexplicable that fall into this third category that for convenience we may term things which God permits.

We shall be drawn aside from the main issue if we include in this term all the supposed suffering in the natural world, for, though it is real enough to us, it certainly is not as painful as we suppose. There is a vast difference between our capacity for feeling pain, and that of the lower orders of life. The beast and the insect have not the highly sensitive nervous system we possess, and, as has been pointed out by a gifted apologist, when the rationalist raves about the poor beetle writhing in the dust, its back broken by the heel of a passer-by, happily for the beetle, though unhappily for the argument, the beetle has no backbone to break! We read into the death of the lower creatures the pain that our sensitive minds imagine. "We conclude," says the authoritative voice of Alfred Russel Wallace, "that the popular idea of the struggle for existence entailing misery and pain on the animal world, is the very reverse of the truth. What it really brings about is the maximum of life and of the enjoyment of life, with the minimum of suffering and pain."

Turning then to the problem of untraced pain, we find that there is only one key that will unlock the doors of mystery. It is the key shaped by Christ. If pain is not wholly retributive, there must be some other explanation: it is that God uses this method to reach some cherished end for His children. He may not be able to take us into His confidence about it all, simply because we are incapable of full comprehension. But His character, revealed in a thousand ways as merciful and gracious, ought to be our

guarantee of the good. Perhaps God expects of us what we expect of our children: a love that does not depend on complete understanding of all we do, but that trusts where it cannot trace.

Imagine a father taking his child of six into his factory. There is machinery of the most complicated kind that even to the uninitiated adult seems a mass of whirling wheels, dealing with the raw material. They follow the process from one department to another, till at last the finished article is reached. But has the little mind been able to understand it all? Is it necessary that it should do so before it can believe in the wisdom and love of the father? And yet her happiness and comfort are bound up with the goods produced in that factory, for by means of them food and raiment are hers. The analogy does not carry us all the way, but compared with the Infinite, our minds are just as limited as that of the child. Then if her father expects her trust, ought God to expect less?

#### ALL PAIN IS NOT PURPOSELESS

Arguing from a child-like trust based not on perfect knowledge of the Father's doings but on personal knowledge of Him, we can advance. Assume for the moment that He is the all-loving, and we say at once, then He must be consistent with His character. He who is the source of wisdom will always choose the best for His children, and one day His honour will be vindicated, even at the bar of His creatures. Yet this is no mere assumption; we have a record of God's ways in the world, and the testimony of the ages is that "He doeth all things

well." Moreover, we have the witness of Christ himself who, because He was one with God, revealed the heart of the Eternal as no other could. One of the most striking comparisons that our Lord made was between the best human father that man ever knew and the exceeding goodness and generosity of the Father in heaven.

Now Jesus did not evade the problem of pain: He looked it squarely in the face without disclaiming the divine responsibility for it. There was pain caused by sin; that was man's own doing, and as he sowed he must reap. There was pain caused by the sin of others; and as we are bound up in one bundle of life, it must needs be that the innocent are compelled to share the shame and sorrow that sin brings. But this other fact of permitted pain—what is its purpose, and why need it be? Let us reiterate the statement that retribution is not the key to it. In one of Raemaeker's cartoons, called "The triumph of the Zeppelin," there is a hospital bed, beside which sits a broken-hearted man. His grief is seen in every line of the half-hidden face, for the still form on the bed is his wife. But our eyes turn to the child standing there, quite unable to take in all this blow means to her. She is wrestling with this problem that we are considering, for she says, "But mother had done nothing wrong, had she, Daddy?"

Then perhaps good can come out of evil? The truth is, pain and suffering may be God's angelic ministrants, safeguarding the good of mankind. For one thing, pain is a sentinel, warning the life of attacks that are being made on it. It is a danger signal which tells the passenger that some mishap has occurred, as though some invisible hand pulled

the communication cord bringing the train to a standstill. Or, to put it another way, it is a messenger warning man that he has knowingly or unwittingly transgressed the laws of life, and thus seeking to deter him from pursuing a course that may prove fatal. We are not diminishing the fact of pain when we say that were there no effects visible to the eyes and patent even to the passer-by, there might be less heed taken of the evils that prevail in the world. Our attention is drawn to the needs of the race when we see "man's inhumanity to man" leaving such dire happenings in its wake, and we ask, Who would champion the cause of the sweated hireling, the ill-housed and the unfortunate, did we not actually see the awful effects that greed and oppression produce? So we may rightly claim that pain is one of the most reliable safeguards that Providence ever devised. For when the voice of conscience is stifled or the calls of an outraged body are unheeded, the voice of pain speaks with such force that man must listen.

Again, suffering is a school in which many a precious lesson is learned. It makes a man think, and that is no easy task. Sometimes it shows him that he has much to learn. There was a time not very remote when France was happy and prosperous. She loved pleasure. She delighted in things that appealed to the senses, so that some affirmed with vehemence that France had lost her soul. But then came a time of tremendous trial and we who have seen her churches in peace time but sparsely filled with women and children, have also seen the nation on its knees, when the thunders of war rolled overhead, supplicating the Divine aid as it knelt in the churches or

as, with moving yet silent lips, it bowed by wayside shrines. France found her soul; she learned that she cannot do without God, but the teacher was sombre-apparelled pain.

We have all known the successful man of the world, at whose touch everything, Midas-like, turned to gold. His plans prospered. He had more than heart could wish. But he had no thought for others except how he might use them, and no thought for anything higher than himself. He was a veritable man with the rake! But pain entered his life, unbidden and unwelcome, and for once helpless and beaten, the successful man lay in a darkened room, feeling that all the fiends of the Inquisition were at work upon his aching limbs. In that dark room he saw what he had never been able to see in the sunlight of success. For just as one is best able to look at an eclipse of the sun through a piece of smoked glass, so through the lens of pain life is most clearly seen. A sure sense of the Unseen has stirred in his soul, and this man who, a week before, would probably have scoffed at the idea of anything beyond this life, cannot jest when the dread ferryman is waiting at his door, ready to carry him across the dark river of death. While the opposite bank of that river, called the Beyond, had suddenly become only too real. He has begun to think: and his relentless tutor is pain.

It may be that we have had to look on pain in the life of some dear one—a beloved wife or child, and as we tip-toed into the room and saw the dear face distorted with suffering, or deep-graven with lines of agony, we learned our utter helplessness and our need of God. Then all our theories about the impo-

tence of prayer fled, and we sank to our knees with bursting heart and with longings that none but the Eternal could satisfy. We had come to a realisation of God's nearness which had never been known till that hour. So have men in every walk of life, in every need born of suffering, stretched forth their hands in the darkness and found their Father God. Driven back upon His help, forced by the load of life's griefs to seek His strength, taught something of His glorious willingness to help—these have been some of the advantages that pain has brought.

Suffering of one kind or another is the common lot. The thing we want to know is how we can sunder the pearl from the shell, and separate the diamond from the stones and dirt. Pain is profitless, only embittering and hardening the heart, unless it be met in the right way. In Sir Walter Scott's journal we read the story of his misfortunes and his sufferings borne with sublime fortitude and unflinching faith. How was it done? Another of fortune's favourites was Sir Henry Irving. For twenty-five years he held the premier place in his art. He was famous. He was fêted. Learned societies vied with one another in doing him honour. The tide of prosperity flowed high. But the ebb set in. Blow after blow fell, not while he was still young and able to sustain the shock, but when the weight of years was bowing the upright frame with its load. A great fire destroyed forty-four productions, and of the £30,000 involved, only one-fifth was insured. Shortly afterwards, he met with an accident to his knee, so that for months he was *hors-de-combat*. Then ill-health and an affection of the throat, which made life a misery and work an intolerable burden,

added to his cares. Did he quail before these battalions of trouble? No! his heart was still staunch and true to the end. He had learned where strength can be found.

What is true of these two distinguished men may be true of every one of us if we approach suffering from the right standpoint.

#### ALL PAIN IS FULL OF GRACIOUS POSSIBILITIES

Its chief work is to sweeten and refine the human soul. Were it not for the presence of pain in the world, we might become a race of easy-going, ease-loving egoists, caring nothing for the good of mankind in general, and incapable of sympathy and unselfish service. Pain makes such a course impossible for most of us. Like the angel who came to Isaiah in his vision, cleansing his lips with the live coal from the altar, the angel of pain comes to cleanse and refine the life of mankind. What is more, it reveals latent possibilities of genuine greatness. Suffering discovers the sublime in the soul.

In the quiet bosom of the hills lies a bed of marble. One day, long ago now, workmen appeared with strange implements and began their task. With laborious effort they drilled a hole in the hillside. Then they inserted a charge. Soon, as though the whole earth were dissolving with fervent heat and the mighty thunders of impending doom were rumbling with wrath, the bosom of the hills was rent in twain. Huge blocks of marble were torn from their resting-place, and the scene was one of desolation. But then the workmen who had done the deed returned and with swinging blows the blocks of marble were rough-hewn and transported.



One is taken to the studio of a sculptor. And all-through which that miserable marble passed is as nothing to what awaits it now. Piece after piece is cut away. The cleaving strokes of the chisel are daily making that block less in bulk, and one might almost expect the soul of the marble to cry out in anger at the appalling waste of its substance, and bid its tormentor stay his hand. But he works away. And lo! after many days, the meaning of the mystery is plain. Imprisoned in the shapeless stone was an angel that only the eye of genius could see. His work was to liberate it from its chill dungeon. There, the rough exterior and the weather-stains gone, we look on a radiant figure, spotless, symmetrical and sublime, with wings poised for flight. And who shall say that all has not been worth while?

A musician takes a new string from its idle coil, and fitting it to his violin, he stretches it taut. He strikes a chord on the piano, and the string—moaning with pain as his finger touches it—is tightened till it seems that breaking-point must soon be reached. What! still tighter? Yea, till the taut string answers full and clear to the tone of the piano. Then the master takes his bow and sweeps from those strings a shower of melody as the April winds carry the pearl-drops from the pendant boughs. A string without tension is a string without soul!

We need not attempt to explain it. But it is a fact to gladden the heart that as the man born blind received his sight at Christ's hands, so the soul that suffers begins to see. Carlyle has pointed out that had not Dante suffered as he did the world would have been the poorer. His land might have had another prosperous citizen, but the race would have

one sublime singer less. Denied the woman he loved, driven forth to exile, a sentence of death issued against him should he return, Dante had two courses open to him: he could have dropped down the slippery slopes of despair, or he could climb the arduous heights of vision and poetry. He chose the latter, and through his agony of soul the centuries have become vocal with his splendid genius. Pain was the finger-post to the peak.

Tennyson's grief for his dead friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, gave birth to his matchless "In Memoriam." And all the world knows that from the invalid couch of Catherine Booth flowed forth the sympathy for the fallen and outcast which made the Salvation Army such a power for good.

Paderewski was always a great musician. But it was only when he mourned the loss of his wife that he turned to his instrument as the antidote for his passionate sorrow, and there he found too an outlet for his soul. He played first to get relief. Then he played to give expression to the highest aspirations of his life. Pain and passion were united in holy wedlock, and of that union his greatest art was born. Suffering released the imprisoned soul.

If we could only look at God's ways as we ought, we would see in pain not a fiend to torture, but an angel to guide us to nobler things. We would not become embittered by our experiences, but be ennobled by them. The sweetest souls that grace the earth and make it fragrant are oftentimes those who have suffered most. Impoverished in some ways, but they have been enriched in others. They may have lost much, but they have gained more. Over and over again, eyes that might have become dim

through living in the garish light of pleasure have been gifted with power to discern the hidden glories of life through the cleansing tear-drops.

Again, new springs of sympathy are thus discovered for the needy souls of men. The hard rock of selfishness is smitten by the hand of pain, and waters of succour gush out. "In the time of Christ," as Dr. Schanz remarks, "all sympathy was killed by the theory that all suffering was the penalty of specific sin, a theory which fostered a merciless type of righteousness." But the Son of Man, who though He was a son, yet learned obedience through the things that He suffered, changed all that. He made pain a way by which not only the sufferer might be ennobled and blessed, but also the needs of others might be met. As Tolstoy says, "It is by those who have suffered, not by those who have inflicted suffering, that the world has been advanced."

We need to face the problem of pain anew and from a right attitude to the dispensations of Providence, to gain power to feel for the forlorn and the friendless, the suffering and the submerged. Callous commercialism, or senseless chatter about the superman will not help the world. But the heart at leisure from itself, having learned the lessons that pain teaches, can and will. It has not shrunk from its instructor because it is shrouded in a sombre robe. Nay, it has pulled that garment aside and, looking upon the face of the visitant, has seen the face of an angel.

So all pain is not punishment, nor is pain purposeless. It may be God's finger-post pointing out the path to life's most precious possessions.

## II

### THE PROBLEM OF PRAYER

**T**HERE is no problem more puzzling than that of prayer, especially unanswered prayer. It is a spectre of the mind that must be laid. It is a question that demands answering. The reason is not far to seek. Prayer is one of the deepest instincts of the soul. Go where we will, we find man trying to express his consciousness of Something other than himself. The most cultured man of the modern world, the untutored savage ranging the gloomy paths of the forest, has each his belief in the need and value of prayer. Such a belief will express itself in its own way. The savage will go to some reputedly sacred spot, and either through the mediation of his medicine-man or by some solemn rite, he will invoke the Unseen. The other will voice the same deep desires of his nature, though he may do it less ostentatiously. But this is the point: both will pray somewhere, somehow, to something, for man feels he ought to pray.

Yet we have also to admit that sometimes man may feel he ought not. What is the use, he asks, if God knows man's needs? If God knows best, why presume to ask for anything specific? If God does hear human supplication, can it make any difference when the world is governed by natural law? Thus the matter bristles with difficulties. And we

have either to try to answer the legitimate questions of the soul, or else abandon all claim to be intellectually sincere. There are some people to whom prayer is one of the most real facts of their experience. They are so sure that God hears and that He can be trusted that their faith would not fail though all the happiness of earth were withdrawn from them. Like the forest oak, the roots of which go down so deep that the storm that lays the ill-rooted sapling low only serves to give greater grip of the earth, these choice souls stand steadier the more their faith is tried. They have prayed and they have been helped. They have asked and received. And so they know no doubts. But what of those who have no such fine faith, who, like Jeremiah, might say, "When I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer"? Their hearts would fain believe, but their heads rebel! In common with us, they wonder why it is that if God does hear prayer, so many prayers seem to go unanswered.

This is the position of many of us. We have two books, side by side. One is the Book of God, filled with promises that induce us to pray by assuring us that the soul's petition will secure an answer. The other is that volume that we handle six or seven days a week, called the Book of Life, recording our varied experiences. Now these two books seem flatly to contradict one another sometimes, and it is these contradictions which cause so much disquiet and distrust. For this is the sum of the matter: the Book of God says Pray—prayer is always effectual when offered aright; the Book of Life says prayer is often ineffectual even when the

need is most urgent! What then are we to say? Our aim in this chapter is to help the believing to a firmer belief, and at the same time to assist those who are groping for the good which the Bible promises, but which life seems to deny. A truer conception of prayer will clear away many of the difficulties that now surround it.

### HAS PRAYER ANY REAL VALUE WHEN WE INVOKE THE DIVINE PROTECTION?

The feeling of many who have commended either their dear ones or themselves to the express care of God is that prayer is apparently so uncertain a factor that it is largely valueless when a specific request is made. We hear of some wonderful answers to prayer, but they seldom come to us? Why is this, if God has no favourites?

Such a question is not asked in the spirit of carping. It is a natural instinct to commend those we love to the care of the good Father, and moreover, we are encouraged by countless promises thus to seek the aid of the Supreme. But the puzzling thing is, sometimes we have the fullest warrant for believing that our prayer has been heard, and yet, in other instances, we know that it has not! We hear of a man who firmly believes in the efficacy of prayer for safety. As he left home one morning, having first commended himself to the care of God, this was demonstrated to him. He intended taking a railway journey, but by forgetting some important papers and having to return home for them, he missed his train. He therefore decided to postpone the journey until the next day. But imagine his feelings

when, on opening his evening paper, he read that the express by which he ought to have gone that morning had been wrecked. That proves God answers prayer, he says. But we are inclined to ask, What of all the rest of those who traveled—the dead and the injured? Was he the only man who prayed for the Divine care and the only one on whom God was pleased to have mercy?

The same thing applies to that awful experience undergone by the passengers of the ill-fated *Lusitania*, when she plunged to the depths. Some lives were saved, but more than a thousand others sank to their ocean grave. Are we to think that when, on the first Sunday out, the passengers gathered in the saloon and sang:

“O hear us when we cry to Thee,  
For those in peril on the sea,”

God heard the prayers of the few and not of the many? Surely, God is not like that. We make bold to say that those who sank in the cold embrace of death were as dear to the Eternal Heart as those who were saved from their perilous plight. Yet in some cases, prayer seems to have been effectual, and in others it achieved nothing.

Nor is that all. While we may be convinced that prayer for specific good cannot avail, on the other hand we are just as sure that it can. The fact is, we have all had answers to our prayers. It is that which makes us continue to pray even when the altar lights of faith burn dimly. Were we not sure that God does hear His children, and that He is personally interested in their welfare, life would be intolerable. Its loads would crush us to the

earth. Whence, then, comes our faith? As we look back, we can distinctly recall one instance after another of how the darkness was pierced by a ray of light divine, or how deliverance came when we were almost on the brink of despair. We cried to the Lord in our trouble, and He delivered us out of all our distresses!

The life with which our happiness was bound up was hanging in the balance. The doctor, with grave face, had said that nothing could be done until the crisis was past, and with nameless dread we stole away to a quiet room and locked the door. Then the floods of desire were unloosed, and we poured out our soul in agony of supplication. The prayer was answered. The life was preserved. With exultant hearts we told ourselves that never again could we doubt prayer's power. Yet another time, when the soul was in similar straits, we made proof of prayer. But the heavens seemed as brass. The life for which we agonised was not spared; the good on which we had set our hearts was not granted, and faith received a blow under which it reeled. Prayer for the help of God does avail sometimes, but sometimes, it seems to disappoint the hopes to which before it gave rise. What is the reason?

#### HAS PRAYER ANY REAL VALUE WHEN WE ASK FOR THE SHAPING OF EVENTS?

We are assured by those who are most competent to speak that the natural world is controlled by unalterable laws. Nothing can depart from the fixed order, and prayer is therefore unscienti-



fic. For example, Professor Tyndall says: "Without the disturbance of a natural law as serious as the stoppage of an eclipse, or the rolling of the river Niagara up the Falls, no act of humiliation could call one shower from heaven, or deflect upwards a single beam of the sun." But no one disputes that. Prayer is not to be condemned as impracticable on such a flimsy pretext as the weather. We do not dispute the fixed order in the universe. It would be a strange world if we could alter the natural conditions at will. Some of us would have perpetual sunshine, unmindful of the Arab proverb that "All sunshine makes the desert," and we would banish the piercing winds of winter and the frosts that play such an important part in Nature's economy. But over against the one scientist we can put the word of another equally distinguished. Sir Oliver Lodge says, "It ought to be admitted at once by the natural philosophers that the unscientific character of prayer for rain depends really not upon its conflict with any known physical law, but upon the disbelief of science in any power that can and will attend and act. As to what is scientifically impossible or possible, anything not self-contradictory or inconsistent with any other truth is possible. In spite of anything said by Professor Tyndall, this statement must be accepted as literally true for all we know to the contrary. . . . Prayer for a fancied good that might really be an injury would be foolish; prayer for breach of law would be not foolish but profane. But who are we to dogmatise too positively concerning law?" The fact is, the evidence we have in the natural world of a God who loves order and who has framed the universe as

an expression of Himself, may serve to help us to a fuller understanding of His ways with mankind.

Our Lord plainly teaches that there is a purpose for every child of man. The years and what they may bring are known to the Father. The way we have traveled, the way we have still to tread, alike lie open to the eyes of the Infinite, and He has a purpose of good for His creatures. It is the same with every true father. He has never stood by the cot of his child without the heart swelling with high hope for the future. He sees there, not the helpless infant, but the man or the woman yet to be, and all his efforts, as well as all his plans for that child, are that the highest good may be secured. So it is with God, and this is a point that must be made plain: He is far more anxious to secure the happiness and welfare of His children than even they are to gain the good that life proffers.

That being so, what becomes of the wisdom of prayer? If God's purposes are best, ought we to presume to ask Him to do as we wish, or to shape events to our pleasure? It seems not only presumption, but the height of folly to ask God to do this or that for us. We have sometimes seen a notice outside a vacant shop intimating that it would be "altered to suit a tenant." We wonder sometimes if we ought to expect God to alter the conditions of our life, in order that we may avoid the difficult and irksome. That is what many of our prayers demand. When trouble comes we pray that we may escape it. When some trial has to be faced, or some task essayed, it is often our chief desire to be spared the experience, although when we deal with our children, we take up quite a dif-

ferent attitude. We assure them that it is only in overcoming the difficult and the distasteful that they can ever be true men and women. We tell them that every test they face helps to develop their powers, and we are right in saying so. But we cannot consistently pray that the good Father will allow us to escape every unpleasant experience, nor be spared the painful trial that may also be beneficial to our souls. God would be less than good were He to be moved by every entreaty which has only ease or peaceful living as its motive.

We may glean a word that will help to a fuller understanding of the matter before us from our great dramatist:

“We, ignorant of ourselves,  
Beg often our own harms, which the wise powers  
Deny us for our good; so find we profit  
By losing of our prayers.”

We are always asking foolish things which, if granted, would work untold havoc in our lives. We have only to look back at some of our unanswered prayers to realise in the light of present knowledge, that it would have been calamitous had our way been chosen and our prayer answered as we once hoped. If God had taken us at our word, some of the most precious lessons of life would have been missed, and some of its choicest blessings would never have come our way. Our growing experience has taught us that after all God knew best even when the denial almost broke our hearts.

But at once it will occur to some, What becomes of all the promises that prayer will be answered? Our Lord said, “Ask and ye shall receive,” and

some of His parables were expressly meant to encourage men in praying about the ordinary wants of life. Quite so! But surely there are conditions applying to prayer. We are not foolish enough to present a signed blank cheque to a person without any sense of the value of money, or to loose a boy in a well-stocked larder. There are certain definite laws by which alone prayer can be answered, and it is non-recognition or disobedience of these laws which means so many unanswered prayers. But as is obvious, it would be folly to give a man power to obtain anything which he might desire, and God is too careful of the interests of His children to give them power to do irreparable injury to their spiritual life.

This is where many have gone astray. They look on prayer simply as mere asking and receiving, or, as is perhaps more likely, asking and not receiving. Prayer is something infinitely bigger than that. You may have seen one of the gigantic Atlantic greyhounds moored fast to the wharf by its great wire cables. The tide is running strongly, and one could almost believe that this ship were a thing of life with the alluring call of the sea in its ears, and a wild desire to break away filling its breast. But till everything is ready, it is held in fast by the strong leash. Now though from a distance these cables look as though they were each a rope of great thickness, we know they are made up of a number of single strands of wire, closely woven together. It is so with prayer. There are, at least, seven strands making up the cable that holds the soul to God. We may call these adoration, confession, gratitude, praise, intercession, petition, and

communion by which the human becomes conscious of its dependence on the divine. Petition is certainly one strand in true prayer, but it is not the only one nor even the most important one, any more than the asking for the toys of childhood is the only element in filial love. Yet to many petition is the only form of prayer. They take the single strand and then wonder that it is unable to stand the strain of life's wild ebb and flow.

Let us put it another way. The sun is usually thought of simply as a giver which sends forth its gladdening light making the earth blossom, and giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater. But it is more than that. It is the wonderful force that attracts and controls the worlds. God is not only the Giver of every good gift, but as the Sun of man's soul He wants to do more than give; He seeks to attract and hold the soul to Himself.

### HAS PRAYER ANY VALIDITY FOR US?

As we have observed, prayer, like every other form of energy, has its conditions. If we would utilise the mysterious forces of electricity definite laws must be obeyed. The power must be conducted to our apparatus and appliances. There must be insulation as well as contact if we want light and power. So it is with the mighty forces of prayer which God has placed within reach of the soul. Here are some of the ascertained conditions of effectual prayer.

First, prayer must be according to God's will. The fact that we are bidden to present our petitions in the name of Christ implies this. It is not in-

voking the aid of a friend at court. It is certainly not seeking to get what we want by the familiar device of "using influence." That may obtain when we endeavour to wrest some favour from a reluctant state department, but it is not the method that God countenances. When the soul approaches the Divine Benefactor presenting its petition in the name of the Son, it must be with the assurance that such a prayer is that which the Son Himself would approve. Moody relates an incident that may serve to make this plain. There was a man of the legal profession who, during the Civil War in America, was heart and soul in his efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded, and bring cheer to the stricken men. In a hundred ways he was giving time and money to the cause. But he found that he was neglecting his work, and an important case down for hearing, he resolved to look after his affairs a little more. That day a man on crutches hobbled into his office bearing a letter from the lawyer's son in the army, and asking the father to do all he could for this wounded fellow, "for my sake!" His good resolutions went by the board. Though he had never set eyes on this man before, "for my sake" made an irresistible appeal. It was as though his own boy looked at him through the stranger's eyes, asking for help.

So God sees His alien children in the light of His dear Son, and for the sake of Jesus, the petitions they bring are surely heard. But there is more than that. Such supplications must have the spirit of sonship pervading them. It is only where the will of the Father is put before all else that the name of the Son can be rightly employed and

an answer assured. We do not receive all we ask just because we append Christ's name to a petition which may be selfish or even stupid. The wounded man would not get anything that whim or fancy might suggest. He got the best, but only the best; that which could be done for him without interfering with his recovery and his highest good. So when the filial spirit inspires the prayer as well as hallows it, then, "Ask and ye shall receive" is a promise that God will be swift to honour. Take a concrete instance that provides a touchstone by which all prayer may be tested. Jesus always manifested the spirit of submission to the Father's will, and never is this more clearly seen than when He knelt in that awful hour in Gethsemane. All the world seemed against Him. The darkness that wrapped Him about was but typical of the gloom that human hate and misunderstanding had brought. Yet He could pray. There with the moonlight casting a fretted pattern through the branches, and the sleeping disciples only a stone's throw from Him, He poured out His soul. He reveals His true humanity in dreading the horror that lay before Him. His real divinity is also seen as He shrinks from the degradation that identification with the sinful race would involve, culminating upon the cross. There in the solitude Christ prayed that the cup of suffering might pass from Him; but the apex of true prayer is reached in the glorious words, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done."

Before we discuss this further, take another instance. Paul suffered some handicap that was interfering with his work. He calls it "a thorn in the flesh." It was such a hindrance that it made his

life a burden to him and his beloved work a weariness, so that he could not use his opportunities as he wished. Three times he prayed that it might pass. Was his prayer answered? Not in the way he desired, but in the way God saw best. And that was, not to lift the load, but to give additional strength to carry it; not to make life easier for His servant, but to make him equal to the demands that life was making. Thus Paul found not relief, but reinforcement. It was so in the case of his Master. Christ submitted the whole choice to God. He prayed that if the purpose of God could be accomplished without the agony that lay before Him that He might be spared it, but His highest desire was to complete His mission, whatever the cost, and so His soul soared to that sublime "Nevertheless." Thus the victory was gained. His prayer was answered, and strength to endure was vouchsafed.

This is the highest form of prayer to which the soul can give utterance. It may specify "this cup," but its ultimate goal is power to say, "Nevertheless," for in that the choice of God is acknowledged to be the best.

This may be the key that will unlock the doors of mystery. "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss." We ask for the wrong things, we ask in the wrong way, and we ask in the wrong spirit. For if we are dictatorial and unsubmitive, or if we regard iniquity in our hearts, then in the very nature of things God cannot answer us as we desire. We meet a mother who has lost her first-born. She cannot pray. The reason is, she has a drawer full of little things over which her heart yearns: a pair of baby shoes, some tiny garments, a few cherished



toys, and with these she feeds her bitterness and resentment till her soul is hot with rebellion. She must learn her lesson if relief is ever to come. We have been in homes where the war has taken its toll. But instead of pride in the gallant sacrifice of the fallen, instead of submission that would have opened the flood-gates of comfort and blessing for those stricken hearts, there have been bitterness and repining. "Every night and morning our boy was prayed for, and this is all that results!" But were the prayers of those parents unavailing? Never! God loved that boy with as great a love as ever sprang from a mother's heart. He even brought him home, for though it was not to the earthly home it was to that place of eternal felicity where the vision of the King in His beauty is never obscured by the mists of earth.

There is more than one way of answering prayer. We think there can be only one way—our way. But God knows better than we. The fact is, our thoughts do not always soar above material things. Food and raiment, happiness and success—these are the extent of our desires. But God's gifts are often "exceeding *above*" what we ask or think, and that surely denotes the quality as well as the quantity of the Divine giving. "There are several methods," says Romanes, "by which it is amply apparent even to our limited faculties that the Almighty may answer prayer without in any way violating the course of natural law," and it is true that there are also many ways in which, that the best may be secured for His children, their petitions may be answered.

Another reason why the answer may be delayed

is that our attitude may not be receptive. We must come into that relationship with God that makes the answer possible. The boy who has begged for a watch must first know how to handle one. He has to believe that it will require care, and that it contains more parts than he will ever find room for should he venture to take it to pieces. But granting all this, he must come to his father to receive it. The father wants to put it into his hand not only for the sheer joy of giving, but because it is his boy, and the heart craves contact with the object of its affection. God is not less human than we are! He cannot give all we ask, even though it be good, unless we come sufficiently near to Him to receive instruction about the use we must make of the gift, and near enough that He may give to us with His own hand. Prayer shapes the soul, making an atmosphere in which it can receive the light of the Father's purpose, and thus be blessed.

We are told that there is a point outside our world, a thousand miles or more above the earth, beyond which there is no atmosphere. Through that space, the sun pours its rays through the ether, dark and cold. But there are no effects of the sun's radiance such as we know. It needs the atmosphere to make the earth rejoice in the mellow rays, for it is only by refraction and radiation that heat and light can be ours. Prayer makes possible, therefore, the good that God intends. The warmth and light of the Spirit are communicated. Gracious influences that help to mould as well as to direct the soul's activities are set in operation, and prayer becomes a power that is indisputable.

Our specific requests ought to be continued, and our needs expressed. "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." But at the same time, remember that the ultimate choice must rest with God. He knows best whether to give or to withhold. He has only the good of His children at heart. He will give success where that can be entrusted; or if that be denied, then failure that can be borne. If pain comes along the line of life, then pain shall yield its most fragrant blossoms. If the loads of life are not lifted at our repeated request, then strength to carry them shall be ours. All prayers are heard even if all prayers are not answered according to our particular desire. We will go further and say that no prayer that is offered in the true filial spirit, that is offered with the will of the Supreme as its goal, can fail of its answer. Pray! the example of Christ, the promises of Christ and His apostles, and the accumulated experience of Christian hearts through the centuries all testify to this: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of!"

### III

## THE PROBLEM OF PROVIDENCE

**W**AS Shakespeare right when he said, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends," or are we to look upon the statement as a good-intentioned sentiment calculated to cheer the heart of man, but without much authority? If one is sufficiently interested to look at a Concordance, one will find that Providence is unmentioned except in one place, and then it is ascribed to man, not to God. Must we dismiss the doctrine of Providence as something once believed, but now outgrown, or an idle fiction, the wish being father to the thought? Whatever our answer, we have to admit that the matter is one of perennial interest, and though the world has moved far along the highway of knowledge, this matter cannot be brushed aside with ruthless hand as unimportant. The Scriptures give us warrant for believing that there is One who is ever mindful of His children.

If ever a man were justified in such a belief, that man was Joseph. There is nothing more wonderful in the sober pages of history or the glowing pages of romance than that story of that shepherd lad. He is the object of his brothers' envy. They dislike his ways, though probably the worst thing he had ever done was to obtain more than his rightful share of his father's affection. Perhaps Jacob was

to blame. No father ought to have favourites. We can readily understand the resentment that filled the hearts of the rest when they saw the way in which Joseph was singled out for preference and regard.

It was little use showing their disapproval, so they took the law into their own hands. Luring him from home, they flung the lad into a pit. Then that good might come out of evil, they sold him to some slave-dealers, and divided the spoil. So, while the father mourned his son as dead, Joseph was on the way to Egypt.

There he was bought by Potiphar, a man of wealth and position, who, seeing the bargain he had obtained, soon gave the young man a good deal of liberty and power in his household. Then came tragedy on tragedy. His master's wife failing to ruin Joseph in one way, set about doing it in another, and it was not long before the hapless fellow found himself in prison on a charge of which he was completely innocent. That mattered little as the law stood then. He was supposed to be guilty, and as he had no money to gain a verdict in his favour, guilty he remained in the eyes of the law. One can understand this young heart becoming bitter. He might surely have said, as Olive Schreiner does, "There is no justice—all things are driven about by a blind chance." But he did not lose heart. He believed in that Divinity that shapes our ends, and in that dark hour, when everything seemed against him, we see a wonderful power of making the best of things manifesting itself. Evidently that blessed faculty of seeing the humorous side of life was his, for he was not above getting some amusement as an interpreter of dreams.

When two of his fellow-prisoners, doubtless suffering from the effects of the sumptuous prison fare, were troubled with disquieting visions in the night, Joseph undertook to tell them the meaning of their dreams. It is possible he had heard something of the affairs of these men, and so he was rightly able to foretell their future. At any rate, things fell out just as he had said. His name was made as a revealer of coming events, and though Time dragged on with leaden feet, at last his chance came.

The king also dreamed, and as is quite fitting, his dreams were far more fantastic than those of the common prison. But when it came to interpreting them, not one of his many magicians and wise men could invent a satisfactory explanation. Then someone remembered the Hebrew prisoner who had shown such skill in making plain the mysteries of men's dreams, and thus Joseph, who had probably come to the conclusion that he was forgotten for all time, is brought hastily into the royal presence. At first he is dazzled by the dancing lights, and awe-stricken by the splendour of the sovereign whose piercing eyes reveal the curiosity that the coming of this youth has stirred. The royal dreams are related, and by the aid of the light Divine as well as his own commonsense, Joseph is able to tell the king of the approaching years of plenty to be followed by years of famine.

Pharaoh is so impressed with the skill of this strange interpreter that at once he raises him to a position of power well-nigh incredible, and when want, gaunt and grim, stalks through the land, the

granaries built under the direction of Joseph keep him at bay.

Meanwhile, Jacob, who has long given up his son for dead, feels the pressure of want, and sends his sons down to Egypt to purchase corn. They are easily recognised by their now prosperous brother, and when by strategy he gets them arraigned before him on a charge of dishonesty, he reveals his identity, rewarding their baseness with a true brotherliness that is touching. But the point to note is this: he affirms his belief in Providence in the striking words, "Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Is it to be taken as true that God was behind all the strange happenings of Joseph's life? If every sparrow's fall is known to God, then what Joseph felt and Jesus taught, that there is an overruling Providence at work in the world, is worth pondering. If we could only believe it! What help it would bring to the weary and perplexed children of men, aiding them in the hour of their need, and casting a gladdening beam of hope across the darkest sky. But can we honestly believe in such a beneficent power? That is the whole difficulty.

#### THE IDEA SEEMS TO BE DENIED BY THE FACTS OF LIFE

The greatness of the universe is undoubtedly a factor that affects faith. Some affirm that we have only the scientist to thank for this. We do not think so. It is only that the truth he has brought to light has been misunderstood. We admit that the world as we know it is far greater than our

grandparents thought it was. Many a cherished idea has been flung overboard. We are not the only world. The astronomer has swept the heavens with his mammoth telescopes and he has told us that there are worlds far greater than this planet on which we live. We are but a speck in the great system, and our little globe, with all its trials and tears, its competition and its conquests, is of very little account in the scale of things. Instead of being the only world that God made, we are an insignificant one among millions. But then, as far as we know, this is the only planet bearing human life, and a world inhabited by those whom God made in His own image, loved so tenderly and redeemed at such cost, must be infinitely more precious to the Divine heart than the uninhabitable waste of the distant bodies that circle in the heavens. This is just what some men have missed. They have looked on the whole scheme of things as so gigantic that to them it seems the height of folly to think that God can care for this tiny globe.

Coupled with this fact, there is the vastness of the human race making the idea of Providence unthinkable for some minds. But we want to know the reason. It is not sufficient to make general statements about what God can do or cannot do when we do not know the depths of the Divine love nor the resources of the Divine Being. We have to remember that, after all, we are concerned with the workings of the Almighty Father. Yet we shall never get at the real facts if we refuse to face the difficulties of those who are often as eager in their quest of truth as ourselves. They point to the dense surging crowds that fill the streets of our



cities. They look with sad hearts on the hives and hovels where the poor are herded together. They read imposing figures regarding the myriads of India and China, and then they ask how is it possible for God to look on the varied needs of man's millions and minister to them individually? The Supreme cannot trouble Himself about the details of these paltry creatures, nor attend even to their cries when they lift hands of prayer. It is incredible to suppose that He can direct their ways as though each soul were the one object of His care! The insignificance of the individual is indisputable!

Yet we are met with this fact: rightly or wrongly, men feel that they do count in the thought of God. Though they look on the vast expanse of the starry dome, they cannot but feel that great though the universe may be, a living human soul is greater. Though they lift their eyes to the mighty mountains that rear their hoary heads to the heavens, they yet feel that there is a place in the Eternal heart for puny man. Whence came this belief in the worth of man and the beneficence of God? Is it all some stupendous piece of superstition that has survived the ravages of time, or is it a proof of the bond that binds the Heavenly Father to the children of earth? There was no doubt in Joseph's mind. As he looked back over the troublous waters he had sailed he saw that the skilled hand of the Pilot had been upon the helm. Though he had suffered many things at the hands of his own flesh and blood, God had never forsaken him, but had so overruled the happenings of the years that good had come as the gladdening Spring after wintry days.

In the ancient city of Chester there is a quaint

building known as God's Providence House. It is said that when a dread plague swept the city on one occasion, this was the only house that was untouched by the grim spectre. While hundreds tossed in terrible anguish, the people of this house went about their daily duties unscathed, and so the good man of the house inscribed over his dwelling, "God's providence is my inheritance." But surely this is very singular. Why should that one house have been spared? We have no record that the occupier was more godly than his neighbours, nor can we believe that he alone had claim upon the Divine care. Let us take another instance. When the ill-fated *Empress of Ireland* sank to her ocean grave, carrying so many hapless souls with her, there were some people who had marvellous escapes to relate. One man had received a message at the last moment that entailed cancelling his passage. What a providential happening! Another was delayed on his journey to the port of embarkation, and when he arrived, he found the boat had sailed without him. Providence again! And there were others who, for one reason or another, had been spared the awful experience that befell so many. Were they the only righteous ones? Were they singled out for the favour of Heaven? That seems irrational. Then, says the objector, it simply points to this, there may be a Providence at work in the world, but it cannot concern itself with the petty affairs of each life; the individual is far too insignificant. In that case, we must accept Spinoza's counsel when he says, "We should await and endure fortune's smiles or frowns with an equal mind, seeing that all things follow from an eternal decree of God by the same

necessity as it follows from the essence of a triangle that the three angles are equal to two right angles." So the idea of a Providence that looks upon the personal interests of man is ruled out of account. The only rational course would then seem to be a trust in Fate.

But while men may deny the fact that God cares for the individual, we place this fact before them as worthy of consideration: Jesus Christ taught differently, and even this half-enlightened Hebrew in Egypt, deep in the gloom of misfortune for a time then suddenly soaring to unthought-of heights, felt that God did care, and verily guided those who trusted Him.

#### THE IDEA OF PROVIDENCE IS QUITE REASONABLE WHEN DEFINED

The greatness of God is one ground for this statement. The world is admittedly vast, but the love of God is vaster. The needs of mankind are legion, but that does not mean that God is incapable of dealing with them. So when Joseph points to the varied experiences of his chequered career, when Jesus shows by comparison how much more precious in the sight of God the human soul is than the sparrow, we are confronted with facts that cannot be lightly disregarded.

Lowell has given us a lovely image that helps us as we come to formulate our faith in the overruling love:

"Over his keys, the musing organist  
Beginning doubtfully and far away,  
First lets his fingers wander as they list,

And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay.  
Then, as the touch of his loved instrument  
Gives hope and fervour, nearer draws his theme."

Thus may we muse over the strange phenomena of our lives, and with the aid of the Divine Spirit come to understand more of that great Heart that beats at the centre of the universe. We may not profess to have the key of all the creeds, nor to understand all mysteries. But from our own knowledge of God's dealings with us and gleaning what we can from the experience of others, help may come to cheer our often perplexed minds. All the happenings of life are not directly to be traced to the Divine acts. That would make God responsible for the ills that man has wrought in the world. But what we can confidently affirm is that He knows perfectly the trials that come to every soul and the varied experiences of the high and the humble, the sinful and the saintly. He alone understands the meaning of life's strange medley of joy and sorrow, of triumphs and tears, and through all His dealings with His children, yea, through all life's dealings with them, there runs the golden thread of His beneficent purpose. He sees the way we take. When we are willing to be directed, He guides our feet. When we are open to receive His aid, He helps us. In ways that are beyond the power of man to fathom, yet in ways that are reasonable enough, the Eternal Father makes all things work together for good to those who love Him. It is not that He has any favourites. That would be unworthy of the Supreme. It is that those who are in fellowship with Him, who are amenable to the discipline of His hand, are capable of profit-

ing by their experiences, and of realising the personal love and interest of God. For God's greatness is the guarantee of His goodness. Of course, man cannot attend to more than a certain amount of detail, and we accept it as an axiom that the greater the man, the less his concern for the trivial happenings of his business or his home. But with God that does not hold, for He is great enough not only to comprehend our ways, and to compass our paths, but also to take a fatherly interest in the frailest child of His great family.

Of necessity, that greatness will tend to mystify man's mind. Some of the Divine ways will be above our powers of comprehension, but then, are not our ways with our children sometimes unintelligible to them? Yet we know our motives are of the best. So it is not to be wondered at if, scanning the pages of the past, we sometimes come across some passages that we cannot understand. Dr. Parker remarks that in reading a book, you may come upon a sentence or a passage written in a language with which you may be entirely unfamiliar. What are you to do? You just go on reading what follows in your mother-tongue, in the hope that you will get the sense of the quotation as you proceed. That certainly happens as we read the volume of the years. We have to skip some passages, for we cannot make anything of them. But one day we shall understand, and we can trust that what is hidden from us is intelligible to the great Author. It is! He understands every syllable of the soul's story, and there is not a word on its many pages that is meaningless.

Nor is that all. There is more than greatness

in the Divine character; goodness is supreme. As we cannot but reveal character in the discharge of life's obligations, so God reveals Himself in His dealings with His children. But can that be true when we see wickedness permitted to run its course and maddening misery forcing man to the edge of the abysmal doubt? It is true. The very fact that they run their course and reach an end, is proof that God yet reigns in the world He has made. When faith is feeble and the sight dim, then we can turn to the confident trust in God that sustained our Lord in His most difficult days. For when His hand is hidden, and we cannot trace His ways in the world, there is always the memory of our Master to reassure the soul by His word, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." As Jesus yearned with unutterable tenderness over Jerusalem, the heart of the Father yearns over His children. They are dear to Him. That does not mean that we never have doubts about the matter. One remembers walking along the seashore one winter day. A stiff wind was blowing, and the waters, angry and muddied near at hand, but flecked with foam farther out, were dashing themselves in impotent fury at one's feet. It was an hour or so after high-water, and all along the shore there was a line of seaweed and driftwood, marking where the waters had reached. Then as one looked at all this refuse of the deep and saw a fragment from a vessel that had been damaged by the violence of the sea, one asked, Is this a parable of human life? Perhaps we are but carried hither and thither by the seas of circumstance, then flung up upon the strand of Time only to be carried out again later into that whirling waste

of waters, and lost to sight for ever. Are we the sport of Fate or of blind Circumstance? To the pessimist, to the determinist, to the sceptical, this may seem true, but to the Christian, never! He is in the pledged personal care of his Father in whose hands are the waters themselves. Thus life is safe, for Providence is not only possible, it is proved. Heber is not often quoted now, yet he is near the heart of things when he says:

“There is an arm that never tires  
When human strength gives way;  
There is a love that never fails  
When earthly loves decay.”

For God desires the good of His children above everything, and though the eternal purpose may be sometimes hard to perceive, it is there, manifested in what we rightly call the providences of life.

Great and good, God is also gracious. With the generosity of the father-heart, the gentleness of the mother-heart, He tends His children. But let us remember that man is still God's *child*. This is where we often make a mistake. We have the notion that when he has come to man's estate, he has also reached spiritual maturity. That is not always so. God has still to deal with him as with a child of limited knowledge, and not infrequently of the arrogance that is born of partial knowledge. So he is set in the school of affliction to learn some of life's needful lessons. He is disciplined that he may be developed on his better side. And while he may resent the course adopted, who is man to say that he knows better than the Father of his spirit?

It will not do to belittle man's worth. It will

not even suffice to quote the saying of the Psalmist, "What is man that Thou art mindful of Him?" The fact is, God has made man little lower than the angels; He has crowned him with glory and honour in His divine purpose, and thus to make man fit for his high estate the painful experiences of life must be bravely and trustfully endured. So great a value has been set on man, that though the Creator has indeed called a wonderful world into being, and though the work of His hands is vast, the child of His heart is dearer than all else. As Lord Roberts is said to have been found by an orderly during the South African war with a Boer child upon his knee teaching it the alphabet, so God is great enough and gracious enough to stoop to the level of the lowliest of His children. As the true father, no matter how brilliant the position he fills, nor how important the work he is doing, will make time to interest himself in his little child, gladly guiding the tiny feet across the nursery floor, or telling it stories in the firelight that its happiness may be complete and its mind enriched, so must the Heavenly Father interest Himself in the daily doings and even in the trivial troubles of every child of His mighty heart.

#### THE IDEA OF PROVIDENCE BOTH ENCOURAGES AND EXPLAINS

Every detail of man's life is known to God. To Him nothing that troubles the human heart can be trivial, and as we turn the leaves of life we are compelled to admit, as Joseph did, that much that has seemed to be evil has really been



fraught with highest good. Many can testify to this even as Browning:

“Let one more attest,  
I have seen God’s hand through a lifetime;  
All’s been for best.”

Certainly an overruling Providence is needed to explain some of our experiences. Do you remember how you were once at the parting of the ways, wondering which was the best course to take, or weighing the pros and cons of some purposed course? Then hardly knowing why or how, you were impelled to decide. You had not breathed a word of it to anyone when you met a friend who seemed to have read your inmost thoughts. Or, it may be, following an impulse that you did not understand, you moved resolutely toward the good. Only now after the lapse of time, you can realise how much depended on that decision and how much has resulted therefrom. It is all very strange. But just as it was with Joseph, some of even the tragic happenings of life have been the turning-point or the preparation for ultimate good that flowing first to us has brought blessing to countless others.

Thus we can look the perplexities of this problem in the face and confidently affirm that if God is great, He is great enough to concern Himself with the smallest thing that affects His children’s welfare; if He is good, then He must be bound up with the good of those whom He has called into being; if He is gracious, then all His ways, though they may sometimes be shrouded in mystery, will one day be seen bright and clear in the full light of eternity ever tending to blessedness for man-

kind. Nor must it be forgotten that, father-like, some of His blessings will come as a surprise. We have many a time as children been gladdened with some unexpected good, and even if the surprise has not come at night, the morning will reveal it. Those who have passed from us into the presence of the All-Good, their hands lifting the filmy veil that hides so much from the tear-dimmed eyes of earth, must have been delighted beyond measure at the glories prepared for them, and could they but speak to us, they would tell how life's tears and trials had been but the preparation for the good they now enjoy, and how wonderful the Providence that is now vindicated before their astonished eyes. But we can enter into something of the blessedness that is theirs. We can trace as well as trust the good hand that has been upon us, for like that Hebrew who felt that he was far from home and yet near to God, the gladness of thus committing our way unto the Lord may be ours. Already it is true

"That more and more a Providence  
Of love is understood,  
Making the springs of time and sense  
Sweet with eternal good."

Apparent evils can be conquered by this faith. Though they may be permitted, they are controlled by the hand of God. To know this is to be helped to a more serene state of soul, a quieter frame of mind in which the soul is free to do the Father's will without chafing or fret. There is a famous picture in the Louvre in Paris, from the brush of Raphael. It depicts the maiden-saint Mar-

garet on a lonely way shrouded with gloom. Right before her is a monster with wrathful eyes and gleaming teeth, ready to devour her. But cross in hand, she is undismayed as she steps over the form of the beast, for God has given her the assurance that nothing can separate her from His love. Power to overcome is hers.

So the Christian may go through life with stout heart and steady step, assured that though the clouds hang dark athwart the sky, they cannot extinguish the sun, though the sorrows and puzzling anxieties of life flood his soul, they cannot drown hope. His cares are God's, for he is God's care, and so, come rough, come smooth, come pain or pleasure, there is a hand that will guide, an arm that will sustain. Eventually he will be led forth to the place where the chastisements of life will appear as God's angelic ministrants, and the very obstacles that have bestrewn his way will be found to have been but stepping-stones leading to the heights on which the redeemed for ever walk in fellowship with their God. "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends," and the legend of the Mohammedan saint, Rabia, will help us to discern it. She was visited in a time of grievous illness by two holy men who, after the manner of Job's friends, came to offer her consolation. One of them said, "Whose prayer is pure, God's chastisements endure." The other adding, "He who loves his Master's choice will in chastisement rejoice." Rabia saw something of the superficiality of these sentiments coming from such lips, and with fine faith and truest resignation to the hand that, though it smites loves to heal, replied, "O men of grace, he who sees

his Master's face, will not in his prayer recall that he is chastised at all." Such an attitude and such trust will disperse the mists of perplexity that have veiled the face of the Almighty, and though the valley be filled with vapours, the guiding light shall lead us to the heights of holiness and peace.

## IV

### THE PROBLEM OF THE DIVINE INDIFFERENCE

THE apparent indifference of God when evil is rampant in the earth has always given rise to a certain amount of perplexity. Man has seen ruin threatening all he holds dear. He sees some enemy of the race ravaging the fair earth. He feels himself powerless to withstand the onslaughts of tyrannous overlords who usurp the sovereignty of right and drag the innocent at their chariot wheels. Then he calls to the Lord of Heaven to vindicate the right. But from the distant skies there is no response, and as though to mock his faith, memories of past deliverances wrought for his fathers rise like spectres from the ruined cloisters of the past. In days gone by, the Lord made bare His holy arm in the eyes of the nations. Then, as when Elijah called upon Him at Carmel, there was an answer and the right emerged triumphant. But now the ear of the Eternal seems heavy or His heart indifferent, and man cries out in bitterness of soul, "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down."

Thus cried one of the old Hebrew prophets, a sensitive soul, that saw the havoc the enemy had wrought in the land he loved, the apparent en-

thronement of evil and the worsting of the good, and he felt that the honour of God was in question.

THERE ARE GOOD REASONS WHY GOD  
SHOULD INTERFERE

Time had been telling on the nerves of the prophet. He was no less human than we, and even the most casual reader of Hebrew history can see why this man felt so strongly the inactivity of God. Evil was triumphant. The Chaldean conquest was complete. The land of his fathers was depopulated. Towns and villages had been destroyed so that the landscape that was once pleasing to the eye was now blotched and stained with the marks of ruthless destruction. The stately towers and shapely domes of the holy city which had once shone in the golden glow of the setting sun, touched by its magic into radiant hues of jasper and gold, or silhouetted after dark against the deep blue of the Syrian sky, were gone. Rent and ruined lay the walls that had once been the very symbol of strength and stability, and the sacred places of Jerusalem were trodden by the defiling feet of the alien. Despair like a pall rested on the prophet's spirit.

We can understand something of his mood. Yet it is not the material ruin that presents the gravest problem to his mind. It is the moral aspect of it all. He had been led to believe that Jerusalem was dear to Jehovah as the apple of His eye. He had taught it to his fellows, assuring them that God was the champion of righteousness, and that wickedness could never prevail. Yet ap-

parently evil had been permitted to run riot through the earth that God had made, and He was heedless of man's protest. That is why he expresses himself with such vehemence, and in doing so he is the spokesman of many, even of this modern world, whose faith is often strained to breaking-point. Put to shame before their enemies, they ask, not with bitterness so much as with desire to see the right vindicated, why does not God do something?

Another reason why we long for the active intervention of the Almighty is the success of the self-seeking. It would seem that God could so easily stay the hand of the wicked and frustrate the plans of those who work such havoc in the world. Yet He does nothing! They stand in direct defiance of everything for which the name and character of God are the guarantee, and with impunity they flout His authority. We know—or think we do—what we would do had we the supreme power in the universe. Can it be that God is not omnipotent?

Why should men plunge the whole world into misery? Why should selfish ambition, as it has done over and over again in the pages of history, seek to be supreme and bestriding the world like a Colossus, be allowed to shed innocent blood in its effort to set up its kingdom of tyranny? Surely that is opposed to Him who came to set up His kingdom of love and light, of peace and brotherhood. And why should those who degrade humanity by their inhuman cruelty, set at nought the Ruler of the universe? These are some of the questions that men are asking. Nor do they cover the whole ground.

Similar questions face the thoughtful as they look at the social conditions of our times. They have seen the strong oppress the weak. Nameless multitudes have been trodden underfoot that others might mount on their prostrate forms to personal aggrandisement and power. Your sweated hireling, your hopeless slum-dweller, and the ill-clad waifs of the street, prove the assertion. Many a time have we seen names that have been kept for long years without a stain dragged through the mire by prodigals whose one thought has been their own unholy pleasure.

It is not enough to explain away the terrible wrongs with which human life is burdened by referring them all to human selfishness or unbridled ambition. It would be grave enough were the sinner to go his evil way without affecting others. But as we know only too well, the innocent are drawn into the maelstrom of misery that man has made. Although we know the Divine heart is just, we cannot but feel that it is indifferent to the suffering that sin causes.

Some men have waxed hysterical about the ruin wrought among stately buildings and glorious cathedrals. But what of the peaceful homes of non-combatants that have fallen victim to the fury of incendiaries? What of people driven from their homes by the terrors of war to fall faint or dying by the roadside or to seek refuge, homeless and penniless, in some distant town? And to all that, what of the flower of earth's manhood, cut down by the ruthless scythe of the aggressor, what of the anxious and desolate hearts they have left behind them? The crazy Jingo sings about glorious



war. The crafty diplomat has lied so that even the wisest have been deceived. But war has left its foul trail across the earth like the fabled dragon of the slime.

All this simply emphasises the fact that sin brings suffering, and the effects of evil are so far-reaching that they pass to the innocent as well as to the wrongdoer. But though life is so intertwined, we wish that in some way God would interfere, so that the miseries of mankind might be averted, and the innocent be spared some of the sufferings that now bring the soul to the brink of despair. His honour is at stake, for there are some who continually assail the righteous with the question, "Where is thy God?" If a man loses his good name it means much; but if our Heavenly Father should lose His good name, what remains? Shakespeare, in a memorable passage, reminds us:

"Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,  
Is the immediate jewel of their souls . . .  
He that filches from me my good name  
Robs me of that which not enriches him,  
And makes me poor indeed."

Why then should our Maker seem so indifferent to the reflection cast upon Him by His supposed inactivity? When some great tragedy is enacted on the stage of history, He cannot be seen. He did not interfere when Jerusalem was carried by storm by the Babylonian king. He did nothing to deflect the bullet of the assassin that laid Lincoln low just when his country needed him most. Nor did He turn that torpedo from its course that sank the ocean mammoth at such cost to human life.

“Why did He not do so?” asked an educated man of us. “I would have done it if I had been able, and so would you. If God is omnipotent, then why did He not avert such a disaster?”

The question is not unanswerable; it is not even as difficult as it may look. But we can at least ask one as difficult: Why did not God intervene when His well-beloved Son who had done nothing but good, agonised in the Garden, or when He was left by His friends to the mercy of Pilate’s brutal soldiery and the cruelty of His crucifiers? We speak of the innocent suffering—who was as innocent as He? Yet God, the righteous God, permitted it! How mysterious is the Divine indifference. Surely the reasons we have cited should warrant His intervention.

#### THERE ARE GOOD REASONS WHY GOD CANNOT INTERFERE

So far we have put the position on the average man who cannot understand why the Omnipotent remains inactive. But when we come to think more carefully we see that though in the true sense God is omnipotent, He has also a limit to Himself in His creation. As Dr. Ballard puts it with much cogency, “God is not the all so long as I am I, for God is not I, any more than I am God.” To understand this is to understand why the prophet’s prayer for the visible intervention of God could not be answered, and why our suggested ways by which the Divine Father might show His interest in man’s affairs are not practicable. For in making man God set a bound to His own power, and so dear is His

purpose to His heart, that, if need be, He is willing to stand aside till that purpose be complete.

God gave man liberty to exercise his power of freewill, and within limits man can choose as his own desires determine. If he would heed the counsels of God and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, then all would be well. There would be progress to true sonship. There would be not only an intelligent grasp of God's will for the world, but also the capacity to see that man's good centres in that will. For only by conformity to that purpose can man reach his highest development of soul. Yet it is equally plain that if man is thus free to choose the good, he must be free to choose the evil; if he is able to respond to the highest he must also be free to reject its appeal. You cannot have the one without the other. So when Huxley speaks about being *made* to do right, he is unconsciously robbing right of all moral value. "I protest," he says, "that if some Power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right on condition of being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning, I should instantly close with the offer." But that would not be a man, as the great Creator understands the term; it would be an automaton.

A ship meant to cleave the waters and pass from port to port bearing her costly cargo, must first be free. Her moorings must be cast off, and she must turn to the open sea if she is to fulfil her destiny, and while careful navigation will ensure a successful voyage, carelessness may mean disaster. The shipowner has to risk that. He places the master in command of his vessel, and he must leave

him absolutely free, within certain limits, to navigate the ship as he thinks best.

The same thing is true of the human soul. We know that the boy who is tied to his mother's apron-string will never make his way in the world. But once free, there is a chance for him to rise. Of course, there is also a chance that he will fall. No matter how carefully he has been brought up, or how love and thought have been lavished on him, there is always the possibility of shipwreck, and the parent's heart knows what apprehension and fears the fact of freedom brings with it. But it is the only way that our boys can become men. It is the only way that God can make morally mature souls. Freewill is essential to moral manhood, and God cannot interfere with that without thwarting His own purpose.

But while we may admit the analogy between the human parent and the divine, we may think that God should be able to do more for His children than man can. We have a feeling that even where a young man's father may be impotent, God cannot be. We do not always remember that while God can do and does more than any human father, even He is relatively helpless to compel the disobedient. Nay, the whole thing is contradictory, for if God were to compel the human, will then freedom would cease to exist, and man would cease to be man.

How then is it possible for God to adopt a suggestion like that made by Huxley? He could not make man free to choose only the good. To make him choose anything would be to remove choice altogether, and yet that is just how some men think God ought to act; while man may be free to walk

the ways of right, the other ways ought to be so well fenced with barbed wire that it would be physically impossible for anyone to enter them.

If man is to be man and not a mere automaton, then choice of the good must be wholly voluntary, otherwise there is little moral value attached to it. Our goodness is of worth only when we choose the good for its own sake and in conformity with the will of God. When we are restrained by convention or by fear of the law, we are not good in the true sense. For our Lord went so far as to say that some of the most loathsome sins might be committed in the heart without the deed actually having taken place. Sir Oliver Lodge is right when he defines sin as "The deliberate and wilful act of a free agent who sees the better and chooses the worse, and thereby acts injuriously to himself and others. The root sin is selfishness, whereby needless trouble and pain are inflicted on others."

If man is to reach the goal of sonship with God, then he must be free, but as we have said, if he is free, then he is free to choose good or evil, darkness or light. If he chooses the good, then there is progress and peace; if evil, then there is misery not only for the wrongdoer but also for those who come within the circle of his life, and it follows that unless God is to frustrate His original purpose, He must wait till the time for action has arrived. Christ could not do many mighty works in one place because of its unbelief, and in a similar way, God is relatively powerless. But while that is so, it does not follow that God is inactive. He is always assisting His children when they will permit Him to do so. He guides

those who ask for guidance, and "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." More than that, God became manifest in the flesh so that man might not only see the glory of goodness, but what is equally important, the possibility of living in accordance with the divine direction. In Jesus Christ the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He lived our life. He shouldered our common load. He was tempted and tried as every son of man, and yet He never lost heart nor fell before the assaults of evil. To all this we must add the ever-present Spirit of God immanent in the world. No man need live without the cheer and stimulating sense of the divine presence. None falls into sin without the gentle rebuke of the inner monitor bidding him beware and repent that he may be restored. Light has been given to all men though heedlessly they forget the lamp of faith and walk in gloomy ways of their own choosing. The Guide stands there ready to assist the pilgrim in his ascent, and He is girt with the rope that is to communicate His strength and sure-footedness to the most timid soul that ever essayed the height. That is another way in which the Divine activity is manifested. We may put it in still another manner. The Heavenly Father, like the true earthly parent, counsels His sons as they go out into the world to win their way. But alas! many a time His words fall on unheeding ears. It is only when some grievous mistake has marred our peace of mind that we know that He knew better than we. That is why we come to sing with such feeling:

“I was not ever thus nor prayed that Thou  
Shouldst lead me on;  
I loved to choose and see my path; but now  
Lead Thou me on!”

For though we may spurn the counsels of the good Father, He ever surrounds us with His influence, softening the stubborn and inspiring hope in the breast of the fallen. As the morning sun penetrates the tiniest chink in the shuttered window, so the grace of the good Father enters the hearts even of the erring sons of men.

It is true that God may take another line. He may not actively interfere when His laws are broken, because those laws teach their own lesson. A mother is teaching her child to walk; and for your especial benefit, it is going to essay the great adventure of crossing the room. But little perversity, anxious to show what it can do, thrusts aside the arms that support it, and after a few steps it crashes to the floor and dissolves into tears. It is a sad sight, but the child has to learn to stand alone. And by its mistakes and mishaps it will learn.

A father looks over his boy's shoulder as he does his home work. But the boy is careless, thinking of the game that is far more attractive than arithmetic, and as he goes on, mistakes are inevitable. He will persist that  $6 + 4 = 11$ , but the father lets him go on till the sum is finished and the answer is—wrong. It may be the best way of letting the boy learn. Upstairs the others are at play. One is continually unfair or quarrelsome, and the parent is grieved beyond measure at the foolish and unworthy spirit displayed. He could intervene,

but would it be the wisest course? It may be best that while the others learn self-control and see the ugliness of sin, the offender should also learn his lesson at the hands of his playmates.

It is thus that God sometimes allows evils to persist, not that He is indifferent, but because He puts the means of setting them right into our hands. The evil-doer is sometimes corrected by the hand of the righteous if not by the active interposition of God Himself, and all the time His Spirit is present in the world while the day of mercy lasts, to woo it from its evil ways.

#### THERE ARE GOOD REASONS FOR BELIEVING THAT GOD DOES INTERFERE

God may be limited by His creative activities as we have said, but that is only part of the truth. He is as jealous of His honour as we are, and though His ways may be hidden from the common eye, His presence can be plainly discerned. We cannot see the wind when it blows, but we see the great arms of the trees sway in the air, and the waters of the sea moved by its rude breath. So we can see God's goings in the world. He has His instruments, and imperfect though they may be, He yet uses them to carry forward His royal purpose. There is no need for Him to rend the heavens and come down. He is ever present on the battlefields of earth, fighting by the side of His servants as they take up the cause of the right. He is here ministering to the world's needs, and directing its mighty movements, though none may see the Hand behind the throne. This very prophet



who implored the Divine monarch to reveal His power afterwards admitted that Cyrus, the heathen king, was actually the agent of Jehovah, carrying out the divine behests. For in the edict that set the enslaved people of Israel free and bade the exile return to the land of his fathers, there was the hand of God Himself.

We do not believe in blind chance or a fickle Fate guiding the events of man's life, but in the hand of the ever-present God. Was it mere chance, asks Talmage, that a farmer's boy should show Blücher a short cut that enabled him to get his forces to the field of Waterloo just at the critical moment, and thus win the day? Was it mere chance that when the Protestants were besieged in Bezors a drunken soldier should have seized a bell that aroused the sleeping town and saved it from massacre? The Divine hand is just as plainly seen in the preparation for our Saviour's coming. The conquests of Rome and her wonderful organization, the culture of Greece and her world-known language, the genius of the Jewish people for religion, were all used as means to an end: the inauguration of the Messiah's kingdom.

The church that Christ called into being has played no small part as the vehicle of the divine power. It is quite a commonplace now for men to say that the church has failed. We have heard it many a time and oft. If cheap cynicism wants to score, the church is a target big enough not to miss no matter how small its skill with the bow of criticism. But in fairness let it be said that through the trials which are inseparable from the Christian life, in every movement towards uplifting the race

and remedying old abuses, the church has brought comfort and power, inspiration and help to countless souls. It has nerved manhood to make sacrifices before which the world stood amazed; it has enabled the womanhood to suffer and serve with a courage and fortitude that were sublime. What is it but proof that the Spirit of God has been ever-present and ever-active in the world? Christ is the source and spring of all our social service. He it is who has inspired men with noble self-sacrifice akin to His own, and sharing the sorrows of His people, bearing the heavier end of every cross, He has been continually at work, seeking to succour the struggling, and comfort the sorrowing.

Thus the supposed indifference of the Deity is seen to be a mistake. Better than rending the heavens is to rend the veil of unbelief, for

“Thrice blest is he to whom is given  
The instinct that can tell  
That God is on the field, when He  
Is most invisible.”

If further proof were necessary to show the un-failing interest of God in all that pertains to the good of His creatures, we have simply to point to the changeless purpose that moves steadily forward to its accomplishment. Out of the terrible conflict between the North and South that raged in America came the freeing of the slave, for the fires of war consumed the fetters that held him fast. And a newer, better America emerged from that struggle. The good prevailed. Out of the agony and horrors of the European struggle a nobler day is dawning. We have seen the downfall of tyranny, the doom of

armaments, the discrediting of those who flouted the authority of God, and nations oft separated by suspicion and hate are still to be welded into a new brotherhood in which the things that Christ died to make possible for man shall be given their true place. Love and liberty shall be supreme. The tears and blood that have been poured out shall not be fruitless. Every life that has been laid down shall be as one of the piles driven deep into the bed of the waters to make a foundation for a city even fairer than Venice, the New Jerusalem, and from the suffering shall sympathy and nobler service be born, so that the world may be blessed.

Here in a deserted room a mother sits. The whole atmosphere of the place seems out of keeping with her sombre attire and her dejected air, for the walls are adorned with a gaudy frieze depicting John Gilpin on his famous ride. Hens and ducks scuttle from the feet of his fiery steed, while astonished farm-folk in comical attitudes complete the picture which is repeated at intervals all round the room. There is a rocking-horse without a rider, a box of bricks without anyone to build, a drum that once almost drove the household crazy, but now it is silent, and the forlorn face of the woman, looking with unseeing eyes into the cheerless grate, tells its own tale. But the desolate room is brightened with the soft radiance of a Presence. A voice speaks in the mother's ear, "Let not your heart be troubled! There are other little lives that need the love that your child taught you. They are the unwanted and the unloved, and only now is your heart big enough to enfold them. Feed My lambs!" And that woman, once immersed in selfish pleasure, now turns

to the crowded tenement and the festering slum that she may mother the children by the world unwelcomed, but by the Christ beloved. It is thus that God works.

A father sits with a telegram in his hands. All his hopes are dashed to the ground. He never had much of a chance himself, for as far back as he can remember, he used to carry bundles of finished garments to the warehouse, and bring back material for the insatiable sewing-machine his widowed mother used to work. But with the years he had prospered surprisingly, and as he saw his son growing up, he had said many a time to himself, "My boy, you shall have the chance I never had. Maybe you will grow up to be a blessing to the world." And this was the end of it all? His splendid young life was finished ere it had well begun! Well, at any rate, he had died as a hero. The Presence was by the side of the grief-laden man. He pointed to the words of the wire, "In Action," and then He said, "You loved your country and her cause. You gave your only son for her. It is well! Do you think I do not understand? God so loved the world that He too gave His only son, His well-beloved. And as you suffer, so did He. But in this world nothing is lost. Sacrifice is ever effectual for it is eternal, and your highest hopes for the good your boy was to do shall yet be outshone: he too has helped to save the world."

Moreover, it came to pass that God caused a book to be written wherein was the record of the world's redemption. It was called "The volume of Love," and a vast concourse of people gathered to hear its wondrous lore. But there was Another whom none

had seen but whose presence was felt through all that great assembly. As the story of that evening ere the sun did set was read, a man with glowing face and quivering voice said to himself, "I will dedicate myself to the healing of the diseased," and a maiden said, "And I to the nursing of the sick." As the tale of the talents was unfolded, one said, "I will go forth into the world's commerce with high ideals, and will use whatever gifts I have for the common good." Others said, each for himself, "My pen, my voice, my brush, will I use to bring the noble and the pure to the notice of men." But when that strange yet sublime story of the Sacrifice of the Son was heard, hearts were thrilled as never before, and the mother, the housewife, the toiler and the reformer, heard a voice that moved them to the depths of being as it said, "Inasmuch . . . ye do it unto Me."

Whence came that word? It was as though a cathedral choir led by the pealing notes of the organ had suddenly rent the silence in twain with the swelling harmonies of a celestial anthem. It was as though the whole orchestra of Nature took up the strain. The rolling diapason of the thunders, the shrill piccolo of the winds, the roar of many waters and the sweet trilling of the nightingale, shared in the refrain. It was as though—but what can describe it? One whom the world had thought remote from its suffering and travail wholly indifferent to its need, but who had ever been in the midst of its misery, was speaking in tenderest accents. "Ye thought that God did not care? Ye have been sad because the heavens were not rent for His coming? Wherefore should they be, seeing

that He must ever be with His world-weary children! Said I not, 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world?'"

It is even as Christ has said. The divine indifference does not exist except in our thought. His heart is too tender, His love is too large, to allow God to be separated from His children. And though the days may be dark with the mists of misery or the skies hung thick with the clouds of doubt, we have the assurance that it is not necessary for God to rend the heavens and come down. He is by the side of His servants in every experience. He is before His army in every hour of conflict, and in the end, when the gloom of life is dispelled, we shall see the glorious presence of our God breaking the power of evil and taking unto Him His great power that He may reign.

## V

### THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED

**D**RYDEN in caustic vein once wrote:

“The gods are good: I would think so  
If they would give me leave!  
But virtue in distress and vice in triumph  
Make atheists of mankind.”

That may overstate the matter as far as we are concerned, but in the bosom of all, at some time or other, questions about the justice that governs life are raised. Why do the wicked so often seem to prosper while the righteous are worsted in the struggle? Why do the scamps succeed and the saints fail? We wish that God would so order things that those who honourably seek to serve Him might never be victimised either by their circumstances or the fickle fancy of fortune.

These difficulties are as old as the hills. Religious men in every age have discussed the problem, for there is righteous Lot vexed by the ways of the wicked. David is driven almost to despair as he sees the faithful denied fair play, and from the lips of the Psalmist, of Job, and Jeremiah, the same piteous complaints are heard as the godly man is put down and the ungodly flourishes like the green bay-tree. Nor is that feeling confined to that ancient day. The same questions have sprung unbidden to

our lips as we have witnessed the sad scenes of life about us. Why do the wicked prosper? There are some fine souls whose faith withstands almost any shock, but many of us less happily placed feel the strain that is put on our faith in God as we see the prosperity of the unprincipled, while there is a lurking belief that, after all, the wicked have quite the best of things as this life goes.

THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED IS CONTRARY  
TO WHAT WE EXPECT OF GOD

It seems a reflection on the Divine power. It cannot surely be that the world has got out of hand or proved too much for its Maker, and yet, without indulging in any glib criticism, this is the conclusion to which we feel we are being led. It is forced upon some by the inexplicable inequalities that we witness, and by the apparent defeat of the good. To say that God does not care is unworthy of One who is perfectly good, and whose whole character is holy, and it cannot be that He is deaf to the cries of the wronged, the afflicted, the defrauded. Were it only men of iniquitous and abominable life who call in vain, that might explain the seeming heedlessness of the Heavenly Father. But that is just where the gravest part of the difficulty lies. It is the best in all ages who have often suffered most, and who have called upon the Most High to vindicate their cause and to defend the right, yet they have often called in vain.

Like the gaunt arms of yonder trees, stretched in mute appeal to wintry skies, or tossing their branches to and fro as though in pain as the chill winds play



about them, the heart of humanity lifts itself to the Unseen. There is no audible nor visible response. If only God would stand between the weak and the strong, if He would but order things differently so that the wicked were not permitted to work their evil way, how much easier would faith find it! We could understand the sinner suffering for his folly, and to see justice and right prevailing at the cost of the wrongdoer would satisfy our sense of moral fitness. But how vastly different are the facts of life as we know them.

Scan just casually some of the loose leaves of life that may be yours, and how tragic their record. Here is a widow once in a good position, but by the dishonesty of her husband's executor compelled to earn a living for her children and herself. She has opened a fourth-rate boarding-house, where, with splendid self-effacement, she toils early and late to keep things going. Though she presides at the table, she has first done the menial work of the kitchen till her once white hands with their tapering fingers are now roughened and coarse with unaccustomed drudgery. At last, worn out with the unequal struggle against insuperable odds, keeping faith with her creditors, driving the wolf away, she falls a victim to ill-health. She is penniless and the world is pitiless, while the rogue who robbed her waxes rich. Should these things be?

An aged man is persuaded to part with his life savings by the smooth words of a friend who is "the soul of honour." It may be that while this man is a company promoter, he is also a pillar of the church. So he bears away the spoil to invest it in some shady concern, while aged eyes grow weary

watching for a glimpse of the ship that is to come home, bearing golden argosies. While the rascal moves into a palatial house as the result of his success as a business man, the righteous moves into the poorhouse. Surely God would have stood between the simple old man and such a fate had He known, or had He been able!

A new manager is appointed to take charge of an old-established business, and at once he sets about reorganizing the departments. As is fitting, we suppose, he begins with some who have grown grey in the service of the firm. "Forty years? Yes, quite a long time! Sure you will be glad of a change after so long a spell. What, hope you are not going to lose your position? Well, I don't want to appear unsympathetic, but this business has to speed up, and I'm here to make it go!" That is doubtless very commendable. The unfortunate thing is that in making the business go he is making the trusted but not-as-young-as-they-used-to-be men go at the same time. It matters little that they are too old to get another position or to make a new start, and of course it is no concern of the manager to enquire into their private affairs and ascertain if they have made provision for their old age. That might be resented! So there is only the scrap-heap for the discarded machine, be it material or human. Once more grim injustice amounting to tragedy stares us in the face. It may be commercialism, but it is not Christ-like. It may "be done," but it is devilish at best to discard without pity men who have striven their utmost to build up a business, who have given their very lives for the success of their employers, and whose only crime is old age. It is not the black

mark against a man's name, but the grey mark in his hair that tells against some. And yet it is God's world!

It is passing strange that He tolerates it. We wish that He would cut down the wrongdoer or at least frustrate his knavish tricks. Can it be that God is unable to do so? The heart sickens at the thought. If it were true that the world is out of hand like a horse with the bit in its teeth, or like the wild wayward son who is no longer under his father's control, then man's case might indeed be looked on with grave concern. The whole question of the Divine justice is involved.

If our Heavenly Father can avert these evils and does not, surely He is self-condemned at the bar even of the frail creatures He has created. Their sense of justice is outraged by the grievous happenings of life, and that innate sense of justice is implanted by God. All we have heard of Him has led us to believe that He is just, and One who is ever willing to be measured by the standard of right that He has set up in the universe. The Psalmist expresses just what we feel about God when he says, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne." Yet here are wrongs that challenge God's justice, and men who flout His authority.

This is where the human heart is perplexed. When evils so disastrous to the welfare of the race flourish, and men who seem to despise the provisions of the moral law batten on their fellows and grow rich in so doing, the faith of the godly receives a shock. The cry of the oppressed rises like the incessant moaning of the mighty deep, and the groans of earth's millions, burdened with misery

and justice brought about by the scheming villain, fill the air. Yet only God and the wrongdoers seem heedless of the laments. He has surely not taken the side of might against right!

“Harsh are the truths on which we feed,  
Our heaven seems remote and dim;  
And still the toiling millions bleed  
In struggles fierce, temptations grim.”

If our Divine Maker has power to alter these things and does not; if He is just and yet suffers injustice to prevail; what can we make of all our Lord has told us of God's faithfulness and His love for even the lowliest of His children? Another link in the logical chain is forged from the hard facts of experience upon the anvil of the mind, and this is the whole point: if these were the questions only of the sceptical or the cynical, we might pass them by unheeded. But they are not. They are the deep stirrings of the heart at its best. The prosperity of the unprincipled has caused many a heart-break, and men who have felt things just as Jeremiah did have said with him, “Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee: yet would I talk with Thee of Thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper; wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?” (Jer. xii. 1). The fact is such men have found their faith failing and their foothold giving, so that they were being carried with increased impetus down the slippery slopes that end in the Slough of Despond, from which, unaided, none may rise.

Plato finely says, “The prosperity of wicked and unjust men, both in public and private life, who

though not leading a happy life in reality are yet thought to do so, may lead—and I am not surprised at your mistake—to a belief that the gods care nothing for the affairs of men.” He admits that it is a mistake to suppose that there is any indifference on the Divine part, and yet how puzzling it is to the unsuccessful and to the dupe of the unscrupulous that such things should be permitted at all.

THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED IS CONTRARY TO  
WHAT WE FEEL WE HAVE A RIGHT TO EXPECT

It outrages our sense of right, for most men, other than the actually vicious, have a respect for righteousness. They have a firm belief that behind all the baseness and trickery that disgrace human life there is still a standard of right to which everything ought to conform, and that there is a “Power, not ourselves, making for righteousness” that will triumph in the end. This is plainly demonstrated in the demand made on the novelist and the dramatist. The average mind rejoices in the ultimate victory of virtue, and so, unless it sees the heroine successful in outwitting the villain and emerging with exultant voice from his clutches, it is dissatisfied. It requires that, no matter how he does it, the author should present it with the satisfying spectacle of vice ending as the victim of its own craftiness, and virtue resplendently supreme.

But in the drama of life, unhappily, events cannot be so controlled, nor will the actors conform to the requirements of our sense of the fitness of things. The result is that the value of virtue itself is depreciated. What is the good of trying to do right, and

✓ follow the dictates of conscience if the blessings of prosperity are taken from the godly and given to those who deserve them least? Even the ancient writer says, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency!" If there is no reward for the righteous, if there is no difference between the saintly and the unscrupulous, then the balance of heaven needs readjustment. At any rate, that is what we often feel when our denial of the self and our desire to walk in the ways of God are met only with ridicule and loss. The unprincipled who scoffs at honour, and regards right as a convenient fence that shuts in the activities of his competitor while he has the run of the country, does seem to have the best of it every way, and so again the man of conscience asks himself, Is it all a delusion? Is virtue valueless and goodness only a barrier to success? The sneer of Dionysius of Sicily strikes home to the heart with the hurt of a poisoned arrow. He raided the temple at Syracuse, and his homeward voyage was so prosperous that he said with a laugh to his companions, "See how the gods favour the sacrilegious!"

Then we conclude that religion is without reward save in some intangible way! But one of the constant appeals that have been made to us along that line has been to the law of cause and effect. We have been assured that he who sows wild oats will one day have to reap the harvest. But with equal force does faith demand that he who sows in patient continuance in well-doing will eventually reap the good for which he has laboured. Does the Christian reap that which recompenses him for all his self-denying labours? That is just the difficulty. So

often the good seed is sown where the thorns spring up to choke its growth, or where the winds of adversity chill the tender shoots.

Now without evading the point at issue, religion is really its own reward quite apart from any monetary advantages that may come to a man because he is reliable and conscientious. The fact is, manhood comes before money, and character before cash, and God has placed us in the world primarily for the shaping of our souls. We can at once say it is better to be treated as human beings, capable of fellowship with the Eternal and being trained as such, than to be as the beast of the field, which, though it be decked with garlands, is yet meant only for sacrifice.

“I envy not the beast that takes  
His licence in the field of time.  
Unfettered by the sense of crime,  
To whom a conscience never wakes.”

Yea, and it were better a thousand times to be denied the temporary success of the unscrupulous men of the world, and to have the satisfaction of doing something to help our fellow-men and to glorify God.

So far we have been trying to make articulate the low moanings of the oppressed, and to give expression to some of those thoughts that like poisonous vapours rising from a swamp, lower man's spiritual vitality. We now turn to the more helpful and congenial task of seeking to justify the ways of God to men. How shall this best be done? When Jason sailed by the Isle of the Syrens, and he feared that the alluring music of those maidens would stir the

passions of his men, he got Orpheus to sing one of his soul-enchanting lays. So the golden voice of Orpheus rose and fell with entrancing melody. The music of the syrens lost its charm, and so the souls of the crew were saved by hearing a sweeter song. Thus it shall be with us. The song of hope and trust in the Good Father shall drown the perplexing doubts that lure to unbelief and madness. Life shall become sweeter and saner, stronger and more serene.

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S PURPOSE IS YET  
INCOMPLETE

We must allow for vicarious suffering. It is one of the inescapable factors of human life. Society is a huge organism, and if one member suffer then all the other members of the body may be called upon to suffer with it. As we have already seen, sin inflicts suffering upon the innocent as well as on the guilty. If man is really possessed of free will, the misuse of that power is sure to result in misery and mischief. Even God cannot load the dice in favour of good. He must leave the soul to act as it will.

That does not minimise the responsibility of the wrongdoer, nor does it mean that God is utterly unable to intervene in order to avert any of the evils that man's folly may have wrought. Out of the evil, or perhaps, more correctly, in spite of it, God sometimes brings forth good. Those who love Him and are obedient to His will find that all things, even the ills of life and the suffering that another's sin may entail, are made to yield some good. The fire may be kindled by human hands, but the purpose is yet divine. The gold is cast into the crucible but



it is imperishable, and later it emerges refined by the fire of affliction. It is evident to any thinking man that there are qualities in human character which shine with brighter grace because they have passed through the fire.

We have this further truth to consider. The hand of God is seen in the way in which retribution overtakes the wicked even in the hour of prosperity, and unexpectedly justice is meted out. There is a marvellous instance of this in the way the aggressors that plunged Europe into such suffering and sorrow were pulled up. In the early days of that colossal struggle, we saw the grey-clad hosts of Germany pouring into Belgium and carrying everything before them. Men held their breath. Paris seemed to be within the power of the enemy, and London was to be the next stopping-place. And what did God say to it all? Nothing! Instead, His name was invoked on behalf of the strong against the weak, the wrong against the right. The words penned in those days by Dr. Muehlon, a former director of Krupp's, give us a graphic picture of the state of things over there. "From the balcony of every palace, from every general's camp, there has poured of late an increasing stream of exhortation urging us to flock to the churches, to fall upon our knees to invoke the God of justice, the Champion of our cause, the Protector of poor, persecuted, assaulted Germany—to sing praises to the German God who will lead us victorious over the whole world, for He can find no better use for the garden of His creation than we should light our camp-fires therein. I hope there will be many who neither kneel nor pray to such a God nor for such an object—the sanctification

of the Lie, the worship of Brutality, and the deification of Wilhelm II."

There is this striking fact to be added: in the Hall of Mirrors in the palace of Versailles, on the 18th of January 1871, the old Kaiser Wilhelm I. was proclaimed Emperor of Germany. Bismarck had triumphed over his foes, and though nameless iniquities had been committed that the end might be secured, that mattered little. Now look at this fact: on the 18th of January—the very day, forty-eight years later—in that same spot at Versailles, the Allied Conference met to consider the terms of peace, to undo the old evils, to right the wrongs and secure the welfare of the world. Is this Fate—or God? All through the years God has been at work in the world. And though man lays his plans carefully, God was not on the side of the biggest battalions, but on the side of right. Nemesis dogs the steps of the unprincipled. The power of the wickedly prosperous cannot escape justice. God is righteous. Though we may reason with Him about the prosperity of the wicked and the happiness of the treacherous, He is just as jealous of His own honour, just as mindful of men as the most sensitive among us.

But why should God delay the hand of retribution? We have no right to dictate our time to God. We have an axiom that if we give the wrongdoer enough rope, a certain desirable end will ensue. And it is ever true that "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." Pharaoh was powerful. But though he might oppress Israel with impunity, retribution overtook him in the waters of the Red Sea. Jezebel might put the servants of God to the sword. But later, the dogs licked the royal blood as she lay

smitten by the hand of vengeance. Pilate hesitated when Christ stood before him, for he longed to let his prisoner go. Yet was it safe to do so when the Jews threatened to report him to Rome? He tried to wash his hands of the responsibility as he delivered the innocent to death, but like Lady Macbeth he found that nothing could cleanse the hand of the stain which innocent blood left, and Pilate later lost the very position he had schemed and striven to keep; his days ended in disgrace.

Then we must remember that we who have need of mercy may never deny the Divine right to extend mercy even to those who have sinned grievously. After all, these are God's children, and He would fain give them every chance to reform. One heard of two men in a Yorkshire village discussing the son of one of them. "Well, how is he going on now?" asked the first. "Worse than ever," replied the father. "All last week he was drinking, and he seems to be worse every day." "If he were my son I would throw him out and be done with him," said the other. "Yes," came the response, "if he were your son, I'd throw him out, but you see he isn't your son—he's mine, and I can't do it. That makes all the difference!" Hoping with the love that never faileth, God waits to have mercy on the sinful. But when He sees the man who still flouts the Father's Word, and brings pain and hardship on His other children, then the justice of the Divine heart is seen to be as strong as its love, and the punishment of the wrongdoer cannot be evaded.

We need not be in haste. Our views are necessarily short, and it is not always the shortest views that are truest. You have seen the merchant with

his daily returns on his desk. He can tell at a glance what his plant has produced and what his sales have been. One day may be so good that he cannot but be gratified. Yet another day, while his working expenses are the same, his sales may be down. Is he depressed, feeling that his business is going to pieces? Of course not! He takes one day with another. The totals at the end of the month are a far more reliable guide than the daily returns, while his yearly balance-sheet is more reliable than even his monthly statement. Apply the same thing to God, and you will see that it is only when the work of the world is complete, when the accounts are closed, that we have the data to come to any satisfactory conclusion about what God has been doing in His universe.

It may be a rebuke to our pride, but suppose we do not know everything! Suppose that the Father knows more of what is happening than we can possibly know, and that He sees what is best for His children, need we complain? We cannot always tell how the romance of the novelist is going to end if we are reading it in serial form. We may be eager to know just how good is going to triumph, and how the hero will come forth the nobler and stronger for the vicissitudes he has met. But we have to curb our impatience till the next instalment is procurable. May it not be so with this strange story of life?

There is a delightful poem which shows a little girl reading with breathless interest the adventures of a knight. She is anxious that he should not be worsted in the fight. But her brother reassures her,

for he tells her he has read the tale, and it all comes right in the end. So shall it be with us:

“Sometimes at eve, as the night draws nigh  
That bringeth us certain woe,  
Our souls gather comfort, we know not how,  
We stop not to reason nor know;  
An angel, mayhap, doth whisper anear,  
As it points to some future glory,  
Fret not for the night, farther on gleams the light;  
I have read to the end of the story.”

The end is not yet. The wicked may pass unsentenced from the lower court of justice, but he cannot evade the higher, and whatever has happened on earth, the true estimate of man's well-doing or his evil ways will be formed only in the perfect light of the eternal morning. There, the sense of justice that has so often been outraged will be seen as the mirror of God's own character. God will vindicate His ways. The All-Just will prove His justice to the satisfaction of the suffering, and the recompensing of the wrongdoer. For now we know in part, but then shall we know as God knows, see as He sees. Love will be triumphant as faith vanishes into sight.

One of the lesser known of Watts' great paintings shows Death lying prostrate on the ground, and Time, with his sickle and hour-glass, his power over man now broken, has fallen senseless by her side. But standing erect, his wings poised for flight, there is the figure of Love, with arms outstretched to the heavens, the light of radiant hope flashing in his eyes. The victory is won. Death and Time are forever vanquished, and the soul of man is ready

to be united with the Eternal Father in realms of endless day.

It will come, O weary heart, that relief from the perplexities which now harass the soul. Turn anew to your task; it is not meaningless. Your questions are not without answer. One day the mists of earth's mystery will be dispelled, and you shall see that there is no real prosperity except that which comes to the soul that lives in the light and seeks in everything to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Grievous ills weary the heart and hinder the pilgrim feet, yet, after all, there is nothing—neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come—that shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## VI

### THE PROBLEM OF BELIEVING

**I**T is no use," remarked an acquaintance one day, "I cannot be a Christian; there is too much mystery, too much to take on trust." Considering that he had been brought up in a Christian home, such a statement was as saddening as it was surprising. Nor is that a solitary instance. That man is a type. Whether we like it or not, the spirit of enquiry is abroad in the world to-day. There are some who are beset with the problem of believing. Their faith is small. Their reason demands some satisfaction before they can accept views that their fathers held without question, and it will not do simply to demand that they must believe. Nor will it do to dub them mere doubters and leave them to their own devices. That means casting a soul adrift to make shipwreck on the uncharted shoals of the sea it sails.

To be perfectly frank, faith has many unfathomed facts. The element of mystery is found in every religion, and the more profound the system of belief, the more there will be that will move the soul of man to wonder, or leave it with a deep sense of its own limitations. Because the Christian faith is the most sublime revelation ever made to mankind, it is not surprising if its very sublimity, its profundity, sometimes overawe those who are seeking to know

the way of truth. It is most refreshing therefore to find a great Christian like the Apostle Paul, a man who combined an acute intellectuality with a simple-hearted faith, making the statement, "Great is the mystery of godliness." He is far from admitting that the Gospel is so glorious that it cannot be grasped. It is one of the marks of Christ's evangel that while it is so profound that the most brilliant mind may fail to sound its depths, it is so simple that a child can grasp its essentials.

The facts of faith may be unfathomed by the enquiring soul, but that does not mean that they are necessarily unfathomable. Nor does it mean that because there is an element of mystery in Christianity, that it is impossible for the thoughtful man to believe. Has religion any monopoly of mystery? Far from it. The world is full of things we cannot fathom. Yet we do not quarrel with life on that account, nor reject the accumulated knowledge of the centuries because it is incomplete. The fact is, we utilise the knowledge we possess, making it a means to fuller knowledge. A thing may be mysterious; it is not necessarily untrue. And just as we use our partial knowledge of material things, so we may take the verified facts of faith as our guide till all mysteries are made clear.

#### MYSTERY IS MET WITH EVERYWHERE

The world is full of it. Even the simplest things of the natural world are wrapped about with wonder. Every blade of grass, twinkling in the morning sun, every dew-pearled leaf its pendant drops iridescent with the hues of heaven, every flower that



breathes its fragrance upon the air, has its element of mystery. The unshapely bulb you bury in the soil seems an inadequate cause for the hyacinth or the tulip with its delicate symmetry and its rich colours. The acorn enfolds the oak of stout heart and giant proportions, yet who can believe that such a thing were possible? The acorn no more explains the oak than the egg in the nest can explain the bird with its rich plumage or its powers of flight and song. You may hold a grain of wheat in your hand, but can you detect its dormant life or explain its power to increase thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold?

George Meredith is not far wrong when he says, "Nature is the supreme experience, the highest mystery. She must be approached with reverence, with faith, with sympathy. Then the sweetness of her life is ours. We are able to enter into a groping comprehension of her unceasing wonders." We may add, the only difference between Moses and most of us is that while he realised he stood on holy ground and took the shoes in reverence from his feet, our familiarity with the wonderful has bred almost contempt.

The presence of the mysterious in the natural world is certified by the scientist. As he has traversed the paths of Nature, many a time he has been confronted with problems that have been a challenge to his mature powers. Sometimes those paths have broken off abruptly, and he has found himself face to face with a wall of solid rock through which he has had to tunnel—facts for which he had to find an explanation; and to this day there are some facts for which the explanation is lacking still. The solutions that he has provided move the average

man to wonder, not to say incredulity, and mystery asserts itself again. His telescopes have swept the heavens, revealing the existence of myriads of worlds of which before we were unaware and of which we know practically nothing. The planet on which we live is known to be continually revolving with tremendous velocity, yet none of us feels its motion. Light reaches our world travelling through space at the rate of 192,000 miles per second, while there are colour and sound vibrations perpetually about us of which our senses give not the slightest hint. The mind is staggered by what we know, but the sum total is only a tithe of the wonderful forces operating in the universe.

The scientist further tells us that the solid rocks on which our eyes rest are constantly melting away. What is now covered by the rolling waters was once dry land, and where there are only watery wastes to-day there may be at some future time fair and fertile lands. Geological evidence reveals the fact that Great Britain was once submerged to a depth of 1700 feet. England and France were joined by land. The Azores now washed by the tossing waters of the Atlantic are but the peaks of a great submerged continent that once joined America, Africa, and Europe in one.

Phenomena less important, and yet interesting, are still without explanation. The song of the lark is always pitched in precisely the same key. The tulip emits heat  $4\frac{1}{2}$  degrees above the atmosphere. Bees always make their combs hexagonally. And the origin of life itself none has yet been able to trace. Mysteries sufficient to amaze the most sceptical abound on every hand in this matter-of-fact

world. Is it any wonder then that some of the most famous men of science have been devout men? Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Bacon, Faraday, and Kelvin, all believed in the great First Cause whose presence and whose working were veiled from the eyes of man, but whose goings were plainly to be seen. One is reminded of the Arab who was asked how he knew there was a God. "How do I know what passed my tent in the night—a horse or a camel? I can tell by the footprints. And all may see the footprints of the Eternal in the world around."

The same element confronts us in the world within no less than in the world without. There is hardly one of us who has not met with the inexplicable in human happenings. Though the miles we have travelled on life's pilgrimage be many or few, mystery has met us in one guise or another. More than once we have touched the veil that hides the invisible from mortal eyes, and how thin those gauzy draperies. Looking back, can you really explain that day when you seemed to stand on one of life's peaks and saw not only the path you had traversed but the way as it wound in and out to the distant goal? It was then that the possibilities of life were suddenly revealed as a far-away hamlet nestling among the hills is seen when the curtain of mist rolls back. Life has never been quite the same since then. You felt the power of God's Spirit swaying your soul. The best within you asserted its spell. Yet for that experience, real as it was, have you any adequate explanation apart from the supernatural? What of those strange influences that played on your soul as you hesitated at the parting of the ways?

You did not know just which course to take, and yet now, in the light of later days, you realise that the choice was not entirely a personal one. There was a hand that guided you.

There is a singular incident in the life of one's late friend, Dr. John Watson, the famous author of "The Bonnie Briar Bush," that is illustrative of this point. As he went home one Sunday evening after an exhausting day in his church in Liverpool, a strange desire came to him to see an old friend in Glasgow, of whom he had heard nothing for a long time. The impulse was so strong that he could not resist it, yet large-hearted and sympathetic though we knew him to be, there seemed no warrant for him to undertake such a journey under such apparently trivial circumstances. He felt he must go, so that very night he caught the midnight train north. Early next day he stood at the door of his friend's house. But why had he come? What reason should he give? His questions were unnecessary. The maid who admitted him seemed to be expecting him, and from her he learned that her master was just at the point of death. Watson quickly made his way to the bedside, and as his old friend stretched out a hand of welcome, he said with a smile, "I knew you would come! I've been waiting for you all night."

Was it telepathy, or what? It simply proves that

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Happenings not quite so vivid yet just as mysterious are not uncommon in human experience, and

they bring us back to the same thing: the element of mystery that seems inseparable from life.

Man himself is a mystery. He is born into the world, but no merely human origin can explain fully the phenomena of life. He is subject to the laws of growth, and passes from stage to stage. His body by its magic transmutes air and water, and the products of vegetable and animal life into brain and brawn. He eats of the cornfield and it becomes to him both mind and muscle. Apart from his physical life, man is conscious of a higher life. He knows he is bound by some strange ties to his fellow creatures. He is able to converse with them, and they too from the hidden workings of their minds are able to transmit their thoughts and ideas to him. But more wonderful still is the fact that he feels that he is bound to the Eternal Himself. He desires communion with Him. He is capable of fellowship with the Supreme, and so he stretches out lame hands of prayer that he may touch God's hand in the darkness of doubt, or in glad surrender to the Divine Spirit he comes to realise that there is more than a poet's fancy in the words:

“Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither.”

Yea, even when afloat upon the wide seas that lead beyond, his frail bark overspread with the ominous shadows of the falling night, he has faith that the blackness of the sky shall but presage the dawn and he shall again touch hands with his dear dead upon a happier shore.

In the world without and in the world within,

there are things hard to be understood, but who can doubt their reality? The universe is charged with the inexplicable. And while the great facts of faith—how the soul is linked to God, how prayer avails, how the Infinite became incarnate, stooping to human sin and need—are mysterious enough, facts that are hard to fathom, in common fairness it must be admitted, that great though the mystery of godliness may be, religion has no monopoly of mystery.

#### MYSTERY NEED BE NO BARRIER TO BELIEF

In temporal things it is not; why then should it be so when we come to belief in eternal things? One of the everyday principles of life is that we test things by their utility even though we may not fully understand them. On the face of it, what seems more wildly improbable than wireless telegraphy? One well remembers standing by the Marconi room on a steamer when a passenger handed in a message for transmission. "I suppose they will get it all right?" he asked somewhat dubiously as he paid over the money. The operator assured him that there was no doubt of it. Some time after, an envelope was handed to him on deck. It was a reply to the message he had sent, and there could be no question that not only had his message been received, but there across the leagues of ocean had come the reply. "I don't know how it's done," he said with a smile, "but it's all right!" Without understanding it, he had exercised his faith in the possibility of wireless telegraphy. He had tested its utility. Then if it is possible thus to send and receive messages transmitted through space, is there anything

impossible about prayer? If man can communicate with his fellow-man, may he not also communicate with his Father?

The Röntgen rays as we know can penetrate opaque substances, revealing not only the bones behind the veil of flesh, but also any foreign body that may be embedded in the limb. Why then need we question the Divine omniscience?

Ruskin in his inimitable way was once speaking about the mud of a manufacturing town. "It is not the vile, disgusting thing you may think," he says in effect. "What are the elements of this mud? First, there is sand, but when its particles are crystallised according to the law of Nature, what is nicer than clean white sand? And when that which enters into it is arranged according to a still higher law we have the matchless opal. What else have we in mud? Clay. And the materials of clay, again arranged according to the higher law, make the brilliant sapphire. What other ingredients enter into mud? Soot. And soot in its crystallised perfection forms the diamond. There is but one other, water. And water, when distilled according to the higher law of its nature, forms the dewdrop resting in exquisite perfection in the heart of a rose." Is it then, we ask, impossible to bring beauty and worth from the unlikely lives of men? With God all things are possible, and conversion is as much a reality as re-crystallisation.

Again, trace the same principle in more homely directions. We do not need to understand electricity before we enter an electric car or read by the electric light. We simply take the facts as they stand and utilise these inventions that harness the marvellous

energy of nature for man's use. Nor do we wait to probe the mystery of the digestive processes before we eat. How a piece of bread can sustain life or how it is turned to vital energy never troubles the average man. He takes the only sensible course; he knows that bread does sustain, and so he eats. Why then need we wait until it has been demonstrated to us that there is a spiritual bread of which a man may eat and be made strong? It is the experience of multitudes that God does sustain the souls of His people by "the bread which cometh down from heaven." Must we starve until we have it satisfactorily explained to us that this is so? The wiser course is to eat first and enquire into the gracious mystery afterwards.

The processes of thought have been made the study of brilliant minds for several years, and the psychologist has many marvellous things to relate about the workings of the human brain, yet he is constantly confronted with mysteries that are as yet beyond his power to probe. When we pause for a moment to ask how it is that the spoken or the printed word can enter our minds, awaken noble aspirations, let loose floods of emotion as though a rock had been smitten by some unseen hand, we cannot but marvel. Yet we are perplexed about the inspiration of the Scriptures, and wonder just how God could communicate His will to the finite minds of men.

There is mystery in motherhood. Who can fathom the depths of a mother's heart or measure the influence she wields not only upon the child during its plastic years, but upon the grown man who has long come to years of discretion? Away in some



distant land, or immersed in the commerce of the city, many a time he feels her restraining hand upon him or realises the pure influence of her life, enabling him to overcome some subtle temptation or turn from a path that would bring dishonour. Then if that is possible, we maintain that there is nothing impossible about the Fatherhood of God. He too is able to hold the soul to Him in tenderest devotion. He too can influence that soul, and enable it to choose the good rather than the bad, and to triumph in face of the most exacting tests.

To sum up the matter let us recapitulate some of the ways in which partial knowledge is utilised, and the spiritual facts to which we are directed:

If wireless telegraphy is possible, so is prayer.

If wireless control is effective, so is Divine guidance.

If radiant gems can come by re-crystallisation from the components of mud, then conversion is possible.

If the Röntgen Rays can penetrate the opaque, so can the light of the All-seeing reach benighted hearts.

If there is food for the physical life, there is provision for man's deeper needs.

If a man's words and a mother's influence can affect the soul, so can the power of the Eternal Father bless the hearts of His children.

That we do not fully understand the mystery of the material does not, we repeat, mean that we cannot use the good that is possible. But as we use what knowledge we have the chances almost amount-

ing to certainty are these, that knowledge shall increase with use. "To the minnow," says Thomas Carlyle, "every cranny and pebble of its little native creek may have become familiar, but does the minnow understand the ocean tides, the trade winds, the moon's eclipses; by all which the condition of its little creek is regulated, and may from time to time (unmiraculously enough) be quite upset and reversed? Such a minnow is Man; his creek this planet Earth, his ocean the Immeasurable All, his monsoons and periodic currents the mysterious course of Providence through æons of æons."

#### MYSTERY NEED BE NO BARRIER TO BLESSING

We face profound facts. That has already been admitted. But while the profundity of the Christian faith may be eloquent testimony to its greatness, that is no valid excuse for unbelief. The apostolic word is our warrant: "Great is the mystery of godliness." Since the days of our Lord, the greatest minds of every age have grappled with the facts of faith. Much has been made clear, and the truth has been applied to the conditions of human life more or less imperfectly. But there are some mysteries that have still to be solved; there are some things that as yet baffle the mind of the earnest enquirer. Why is it? Our powers are possibly inadequate.

We go out beneath the midnight sky and look up to the star-bespangled dome. The words of the prophet echo in the heart, "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number." But if we could number them we should find that there are only about 7000

stars that are visible to the naked eye, while the astronomer with his mammoth telescope can see twenty millions. Obviously, it is because our powers are inadequate. The same thing is true when we seek to understand to the full the wonders of the Godhead. Tolstoy in one of his stories tells of a certain king who was perplexed with religious doubts, and who could not believe in God unless he first saw Him. So one day a shepherd, noted for his wisdom, was ushered into the royal presence. He claimed that he could prove to the king that his doubts were unreasonable even though he posed as a rationalist. The king agreed to follow the direction of the shepherd and he was bidden to count aloud from one upwards. So the king began: "One, two, three, four . . ." "Stop!" cried the shepherd, "begin at the beginning." So again the monarch commenced, "One, two, three. . . ." But again the shepherd interposed, "Thou art wrong again, sire, thou must begin at the beginning." "Have I not done so?" asked the king angrily, for he began to think he had been foolish to admit the fellow at all. "What can come before one?" To which the shepherd retorted, "True, what can there be before one? And what can there be before the Eternal One? He is God!"

Then he led the king out to the open sky and bade him look at the sun which had now reached the zenith. He did as he was told, but involuntarily the king hid his eyes from the dazzling light. "Dost want to blind me, fellow?" "Nay, sire, but if thou canst not look on the sun which God has made, how canst thou look at the radiant majesty of the Creator Himself?" And the king saw how vain had been his conditions.

Are we any wiser when we ask to see before we believe? It is not seeing that is believing, as the ancient proverb runs; it is believing that is seeing! The Divine will for mankind is so wonderful, the love of God so amazing, the mystery of the Divine sacrifice so profound, that before the undimmed lustre of the majesty of God man's eyes grow blind. Such condescension is beyond him. Such patience, such pardon, are too vast for finite minds to grasp.

We behold Jesus made like unto His brethren, truly man though truly God. He dwelt amid scenes of human sorrowing, striving, sinning, and yet, moved though He was at the sights He witnessed, His own heart feeling for mankind in its misery, He was Himself undefiled, separate from sinners. He gave His blessing to the burdened and down-trodden. He spoke words of hope to the outcast and despairing. He poured out His life in a final expression of the Divine pity for the erring sons of men. Dying He yet lives. Living He yet loves, that through Him man might not only be reconciled, but also that the Divine dream for the race might yet come true.

We face verified facts. Our Lord is one of the best attested figures in history. To quote Dr. Newton Clarke, "His name was Jesus; His time, the latter half of the eighth century of the Roman period, and the beginning of the Christian era; His race, the Hebrew people; His country, Palestine in Syria; the place of His Death, Jerusalem; the Roman procurator of the time, Pontius Pilate; the emperor, Tiberius. Even if it were shown that myths had gathered about His memory, these facts would

stand, for they are as well attested as any facts of the period. The founder of Christianity lived."

That is only a detail. The best verification Christ can have is in the experience of those who have loved and trusted Him in all ages. How are facts verified? By experience.

You may have your theory about the fall of man and the gulf that separates man from God. You may speculate about the fact of how salvation is obtained. But the fact of salvation is no speculation. Across the gulf that divides man from the Father a bridge has been thrown. The wandering son can find a way back home to the Father's house. He can be united in happy filial love with Him from whom he was estranged, and though the prodigal may never be able to understand why his father should love him, or how it is possible for him to be forgiven so that the past is as though it had never been, that does not alter the fact itself.

Across the upper reaches of the Mersey there is a railway bridge carrying the main line from London to Liverpool. One night in mid-winter we were travelling home by that route. It was past midnight. The wind was howling, and the night black with clouds. With a half-stifled shriek the engine rushed on its way across the bridge beneath which far down the waters were flowing sullenly to the sea. If that bridge were unsafe, it meant instant death. But who thought anxiously of that? Well-built, periodically tested, tried every hour by the trains that crossed, it had proved for others as it was proving for us—the link that lay between darkness and distance, and the light and love of home. It is so with Christ! Through Him multitudes who have

known what it is to be exiled in the far country have found the way home to peace and rest. They may not have understood all the mystery of His life, His love, His sacrificial work, for "great is the mystery of goodness," but this at least they knew, that He was worthy of their trust, and in every way trustworthy. Through Him they found the Father's face. They heard the word of paternal pardon, and were restored to the place of a son at the Father's side.

We face vital facts. Again we say, though we may theorise about the facts of our faith, those facts are not mere theory. They have been subjected to the supreme test,—that of human experience. Christ has only to be trusted with the soul's load of weariness and woe to prove Himself as good as His word, for to put it in Livingstone's memorable phrase, as he nerved himself for his task, "It is the word of a Gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honour, and there is an end on't!"

In his "Thoughts on Religion," the late Professor Romanes asserts that one of the things which weighed with him most when he was contemplating a return to the faith he had once forsaken was the fact that nearly all the men of eminent scientific attainments in his own university of Cambridge were men of distinctly Christian character, and men, too, who had come to their opinions not along the hard-trodden and populous paths of hearsay, but in some cases by pioneer paths they had cut out for themselves through the tangled undergrowth of conflicting creeds. "The curious thing is," the Professor says, "that all the most illustrious names were ranged on the side of orthodoxy. Sir W. Manson, Sir

George Stokes, Professors Tait, Adams, Clerk Maxwell, and Bayley—not to mention a number of lesser lights such as Route, Todhunter, Ferrers, etc.,—were all avowed Christians.” Better still is the testimony of that great company which no man can number that John, in his vision, saw standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed with white robes and palms in their hands. “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

The mighty mysteries of the Christian faith may not be fully revealed to us in this life, for our powers are finite and our minds at best are but the minds of children of larger growth. The profound depths of the Father’s love, the compassion of Christ, the tenderness of His sympathy and the bitterness of His heart-throes, may remain for ever unfathomed. But of this we may be certain, about this there is no mystery: the barriers to belief will be razed to the ground as the soul is sincere in its search for truth. No man truly desiring the light shall be denied its gladdening beams. No man who is faithful to the will of God as it has been revealed in Christ shall walk in darkness. On the contrary, as he fixes upon the essentials of salvation which have been brought within the compass of his mind, he shall know that though much in life and in faith may remain unexplained, at least he has a foundation that shall endure, and sufficient building material for each day’s work, till he has built for the soul a habitation that shall last. Then when the rains descend, the floods come, and the winds blow, his soul shall not

be left shelterless for his belief is founded upon the rock.

I have a life in Christ to live,  
I have a death in Christ to die;  
And must I wait till Science give  
All doubts a full reply?

Nay, rather while the sea of doubt  
Is raging wildly round about,  
Questioning of life and death and sin,  
Let me but creep within  
Thy fold, O Christ, and at Thy feet  
Take but the lowest seat,  
And hear Thine awful voice repeat,  
In gentlest accents, heavenly sweet:  
"Come unto Me and rest;  
Believe Me and be blest."



## VII

### THE PROBLEM OF THE BIBLE

**P**RACTICALLY if not professedly the community comprises three classes: those to whom the Bible is everything, those to whom it is nothing, and in these days of enquiry a large class to whom it is an indefinite something. The first, the saintly, need no help such as one may be able to give, for they have found still waters and green pastures where the soul may be refreshed. The second, the sceptical, have their own theories and dismiss the book as though it were so much outworn superstition. The third, sincere seekers after truth, are those to whom we address ourselves.

They stand between the other two. They were taught that the Bible was the Word of God, to be accepted without question or comment, and for a time they were satisfied; but when they went out into the world, they were thrown into contact with men who freely questioned and sceptically commented on the Scriptures. They were told the book was unreliable, that it was full of contradictions, and that thoughtful and enlightened people no longer revered it. What was the result? No young man likes to be regarded as other than thoughtful or enlightened, and the problem began to perplex. He could not believe that his teachers and parents were wholly wrong, nor in face of things he heard and read could he believe they were wholly right. Science

had made certain discoveries or formulated certain theories. Scepticism had taken these as further proof that it was correct in its conclusions and justified in its attacks. So there comes to be this section of society that hardly knows what to believe about the sacred writings. It is like the pendulum of a defective clock; it no longer swings from one extreme to the other, but remains motionless between the two, and progress is impossible.

Can the Bible be trusted? The question is of the first importance. It lies at the root of our faith, and much of the indifference and weakness of the present day may be traced to the hazy ideas that some of us have regarding the value of the Scriptures viewed from the modern standpoint. The number of people who can say, "I believe the Bible from cover to cover," has diminished, but unless we can give to men a sound and sane view of the Scriptures that will restore them to their rightful place of authority then the outlook for the future is disquieting.

One thing is quite evident. That reverent regard for the Bible cannot come by ignoring the questions of those who have been disturbed by current opinions about the Bible. We must try to meet them, and supplant the error of the rationalist with the truth that modern scholarship has made possible. That this needs doing was impressed on one's mind by a conversation with a usually well-informed man who, while striving to maintain his grip on the old belief, was greatly perturbed by some criticisms he had read. "But who are these Higher Critics, anyway? And what right have they to pull the Bible to pieces?"

The question was saddening, but it revealed much. It proved that there are some at least who have little knowledge of the debt that our Churches owe to the sanctified labours of her most brilliant men. Admittedly, there are critics and critics. The zeal of some has taken the bit into its teeth, uncaring consequences, and with such we have little sympathy. But there are others, men of devout life and of magnificent gifts, who have spent their lives and consecrated their abilities, not that they might take the Bible from us, but that they might give it back to the Church even more worthy of man's implicit trust than before. Sifting, searching, scanning each line and letter of the documents that lie behind our versions, they have given us renewed confidence in the pages that reveal God's will to men, so that we may say with the Psalmist, "Thy word is pure (tried, refined); therefore Thy servant loveth it."

### THE BIBLE AS TESTED TRUTH

If the Bible is true, then it can stand the closest scrutiny. If it is not, then the fact cannot be long hidden from the world. Thus it invites criticism. In the advertisement columns of a morning paper a business was offered for sale, and the words ran: "absolutely genuine, fullest investigation invited." We may apply that surely to God's truth. So we ask, What is criticism and what has it done?

Unhappily, the very term is likely to be misunderstood. Most of us have our idea of a "critic," and from our encounters with him we are inclined to regard him as prickly as a porcupine, and as venom-

ous as he is professedly valuable. He is the finder of flaws. He sets out with the express purpose of tearing our self-complacency into shreds, and while it may be good for us, that does not make us too favourably disposed to the critic himself or to his findings. But the critic of the Scriptures is as far removed from such a one as the poles asunder. He is a scholar who has been specially fitted for his task. He is, speaking broadly, of the most devout temper, and if in his search for truth, or in testing truth, he may point out the difference in value between lead and brass, between silver and gold, then his work is not one of relentless destruction in which some would have us believe he takes a fiendish delight. His task is not to find fault, but to find the truth as it has been embedded in these ancient records.

The Bible has often been described as the Book of books, and those of us who love it, and owe so much to its instruction and inspiration would endorse the phrase. As a description of its moral excellence it is indisputably true. As a description of its character it is at once incorrect as well as correct. The Bible is not a *book* in the strict sense of the term, though for centuries it has been bound in one volume. In reality, there are sixty-six books from the pens of some forty different authors, and they cover a period of several centuries. So while it is correct to call the Bible the Book of books, it is even more correct to call it the Book of—*Books*. Jerome, in the fifth century, described the Scriptures as “The Divine Library,” while another Father of the church, Chrysostom, called them “The Books.” It was really owing to a mistake in translating the neuter plural

Greek term, τὰ βιβλία, as the feminine singular that we got our present term, the Bible.

Now this is important. The books, thus written by various men in different periods, and in three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, are not all of the same viewpoint, though they were all written under the inspiration of the same Divine Spirit. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But God was yet limited by the receptiveness of the soul to whom He spoke, and we get the true conception of the Scriptures when we regard them as a progressive revelation of the Divine Will. The full light is not seen at daybreak, but when the sun reaches the zenith; and so in the dawn of revelation there is only an imperfect apprehension of God till at last the Sun of Righteousness, our Lord who is Himself the Light of the world, reveals to us the full and perfect will of God.

These are the materials, then, upon which scholarship has been focussing its beam, and being true, we need not fear that the Bible can be discredited or taken from us. The more the gold is refined the purer it must be, and the more exacting the test, the fuller the vindication of the Scriptures. Speaking of the tests applied by scientific scholarship, Dr. Fairbairn says: "Nobody denies, nobody even doubts, the legitimacy of its application to classical or ethnic literature, the necessity or the excellence of the work it has done, or, where the material allowed it, the accuracy of the results it has achieved. . . . Now the Scriptures are or are not fit subjects for scholarship. If they are not, then all sacred scholarship has been and is a mistake, and they are a body of

literature possessed of the inglorious distinction of being incapable of being understood. If they are, then the more scientific the scholarship the greater its use in the field of Scripture, and the more it is reverently exercised on a literature that can claim to be the pre-eminent sacred literature of the world, the more will that literature be honoured. . . . Where scholarship has the right to enter, it has the right to stay, and it cannot stay in idleness. Once the analysis of the material of faith has been allowed, a process has been commenced by reason that only reason can conclude. This higher criticism is but a name for scientific scholarship scientifically used."

What are the methods of such scholarship and what contribution has criticism made? It is outside our main purpose to enter into a detailed statement of the methods, but a word or two will help the reader to understand the work that has been done. Our scholars have spent a good deal of time in comparing the various manuscripts that lie behind the books. There are differing accounts of some of the events recorded, and variations in the texts themselves, and this scrutiny of the documents in the original language is usually called Lower Criticism. The other branch of study concerns itself more particularly with authorship; not only the man who wrote a given book, but under what circumstances he wrote, the period and place of writing, and the object he had before him as, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, he thus addressed the people. This is called Higher Criticism, and its main purpose is readily seen. It is to place a book in its true setting, and to give the historical background which makes some of the old writings at once more intelligible,

instructive, and interesting, enabling us to see the way in which God was always mindful of His people, and how in the darkest day there was always some gleam of divine light to gladden and guide the human heart.

To regard such work as mainly destructive is a great mistake. It is no doubt true of most of us that we do not like to alter our views. It is not pleasant nor flattering to find that some one knows more about a thing than we do, especially when our views are long-established. That is why many who love their Bibles have got into grooves in which they prefer to run. Yet as the late Silvester Horne used to say, "the only difference between a groove and a grave is a question of depth." We must, if we are to have a faith in the Scriptures that is vital and virile, take account of everything that will help us to a fuller understanding of their meaning, and a more intelligent grasp of their truth. Instead of the Bible ceasing to be the inspired Word of God, it will be found to be more worthy of our trust. It was once universally held that the earth was flat. We know better now, but the reality of its existence has not been modified in the least because we have fuller knowledge. It was once assumed that the sun moved round the earth, and because Galileo suggested that such was not the case, he was pitilessly persecuted. Now his theory holds the field, but the light and warmth of the sun are enjoyed no matter what the theory. Old ideas may be superseded; the facts remain. So it is with the Holy Word. Larger knowledge may modify our ideas, but the fact that those pages enshrine God's message to mankind becomes more and more clear as the light increases.

The fact is, prejudice has swayed us more than we may think. People look on the work of the critics with dislike, as though these were so many faith-shaking agents commissioned by the evil one, forgetting the fact that "the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever." They say, "But do not the critics affirm that David did not write the Psalms?" Who said he did? If you will look at the titles of the Psalms themselves, even in the A.V. of 1611, you will find that quite a number of them are attributed to different authors or dedicated to different men. Asaph, Solomon, Ethan, Moses, are all numbered in this company, and though, as we know, these titles were added at a much later date, some men make claims for the Bible that it never makes for itself, and ignorance is ever the parent of prejudice. Such dedications are the work of "critics" who lived long before the time of Christ. The same thing is true of other books of the Bible. These books do not claim to be written by the men whose names they bear, though that does not preclude them from authorship.

We repeat, the more stringent the test, the greater the guarantee of genuineness. The more careful the scrutiny the surer we may be that the foundation of the fabric is stable and sound. Dr. Hort, one of the foremost critical scholars England has produced, can surely impart confidence to us when we fear lest the critics may take from us the very rock on which we build, for he says, writing about New Testament criticism, "The amount of words in the New Testament that can in any sense be called a substantial variation, can hardly be more than one one-thousandth part of the entire text." While Dr. Kenyon



of the British Museum adds, "No doctrine of Christianity rests solely upon a disputed text."

Such testing of the evidence on which our faith is reared cannot but renew confidence in its truth. Such cleaning of the soul's windows cannot but let in more of the radiant light of heaven. That is why we hold that tested truth merits more trust than truths that are calmly accepted without examination. The reverent critic is not bent on the destruction of the Bible, but on its better understanding; and even if he were, could he succeed any better than the sceptic and the rationalist? The frontispiece of Wycliff's old Bible depicts the fire of truth blazing brightly, and round about it there is a company of satanic figures and some attired as cardinals all trying to blow it out. Their cheeks are swollen as they make mighty efforts to secure this end, but the harder they blow the higher leap the flames. The Bible is indestructible except by the indifference of those who will not take the trouble to read its divine messages. It is imperishable, for it enshrines the Eternal Word by which alone the soul has hope and can be comforted, and because in it God Himself draws near to the soul of man. "If I am asked," says Professor Robertson Smith, himself a critic of great eminence, "why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the *only* perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the Fathers of the Protestant Church because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation." Not very "destructive" for one who was himself suspect! He goes on to say, "And this record I know to be true by the witness of His

Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."

God has spoken to man in Nature and his heart has been conscious of the Unseen. He has traced the hand of God in the works of creation, and his knowledge of the "Unknowable" has been increased. God has spoken to man in the affairs of the individual life, and sometimes, possibly, new light has been received. But nowhere, in no other manner, has God so clearly revealed Himself as in the Holy Scriptures. There He meets with man, talks with him about duty, destiny, and the Deity. There the loftiest ideals of life are set forth, and there too the tenderest words of love are told: God's redemptive work for the race. And this, far from obscuring, but on the contrary making more plain, the work of the critic has helped us better to understand.

#### THE BIBLE AS TIME-ATTESTED TRUTH

The work of the critic has been supplemented by the fuller knowledge that has come to us in other ways. New light has been thrown on the Bible by the work of the explorer, made possible by the Palestine Exploration Fund, and to this, together with the work of the Egyptologists, we turn our attention. In Cairo there is a museum in which many of the relics that have been collected are preserved, and these point to the early civilisation of Egypt. It is said that the further back our enquiries are pushed the more wonderful are the results obtained. The state of society in those times was far more advanced than we had thought possible. We

also know that the historians of the world did not begin work only with the Greek period, but that a century before the Exodus, there was a literary people in Egypt. Thus the view that the historical books of the Mosaic period belonged to a much later date is refuted, even though they were edited and rewritten at some time subsequent to the Exile.

The Tel-el-Amarna Tablets, discovered on the banks of the Nile, give a most illuminating account of the national and social development which had taken place even in early times. They place on record the diplomatic relations between Canaan and Syria, and the king of Babylonia, Assyria, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor. While the more recently discovered legal code of Amraphel, king of Shinar, a contemporary of Abraham, also shows that the laws of Babylon were familiar to peoples of the west.

We are indebted to the late Dr. J. H. Moulton for a most fascinating story of the precious finds in Egyptian rubbish-heaps. Waste-paper was not burned in those days. It seems to have been the practice to carry it outside the towns and leave the sand to bury it. Owing to the exceptionally dry climate many of these mounds have preserved various documents for thousands of years, and while there is but little bearing directly on the Scriptures, yet their contents have been most useful in helping us better to understand the language and customs of the people. These papers include wills, agreements, private correspondence, and a mass of other matter, and they are written on papyrus.

This writing material was got from the papyrus reeds that fringe the banks and swamps of the Nile. The reeds were gathered and the pith was taken,

out and mixed with a little clay and water. One layer had another placed crosswise upon it, and having been rolled, it was dried in the sun, and was then ready for writing purposes. It is interesting to note that the Greek word for this pith was *βιβλος*, a name later applied to paper made of this material, and hence a book.

Another kind of writing material was the ancient unglazed pottery ware, on which messages were sent, and notes made. These fragments are called *ostraca*, and they too have yielded abundance of useful and instructive material. Writing on parchment belongs to a later date.

Now let us thread some of the beads together and see how the Bible is time-attested truth. We simply take facts that we have culled from various quarters; nothing but the string is our own.

In Exodus we read that the Egyptians began to oppress the Israelites, exacting from them forced labour, and making them build store cities. At first straw was supplied to them for the purpose of brick-making, but later they had to gather their own straw, and we can easily infer that as the tale of bricks had to be the same, the quality would go down. The ruins of the ancient city of Succoth have been discovered, and amongst them ruins of the granaries in which surplus corn was stored for times of scarcity. The bricks of which these stores were built are found to have been made without straw. Thus the facts of Exodus are attested. But in the ruins of Pithom and Raamses the facts are more telling still. Bricks found there are of three classes: some made with straw, evidently while that was supplied to the Israelites, and others with

bits of reed, when the supply of straw ceased, and still others without straw or reeds.

If Pharaoh wildly pursuing the Israelites was drowned in the Red Sea, is it possible for his mummy to be preserved? The answer is simple, for though we read, "the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots . . . and the Lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them," we know full well that Pharaoh was probably far too careful of his precious person to venture himself in an expedition of that kind, or if he did actually take the field, then we may be sure that, as in the case of modern War-lords he "led" his forces from a safe distance.

The incident of the blessings and cursings at Gerizim and Ebal, recorded in Deuteronomy, have sometimes been called into question. It will be recalled that Moses set one party on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, and another on Mount Ebal to curse the disobedient. How could the people in the valley hear what was said from these opposite hills? Canon Tristram visiting the region tried an experiment. He placed a man on either hill, and ordered them to call out aloud this very passage of Scripture. Owing to the wonderful acoustic properties of the neighbourhood, standing in the valley he could hear perfectly what each said.

Apart from a miracle how could Moses get water for the people by striking a rock in the desert? It might seem impossible to some minds had we not confirmation of such a thing in later days. On the Russian Front during the European War the German artillery had been pitilessly shelling the lines. It was impossible to bring up food to the men, but

worse still, water supplies had run out and the soldiers were almost mad with thirst. A shell burst some distance behind the trenches, striking a huge rock, and when the smoke had cleared, the men saw to their amazement and delight that with the splintering of the rock water was gushing out from the place like blood from a wound. A hidden spring had been unearthed, and the men drank.

Another favourite quibble on the part of the rationalist is that about Elijah on Carmel. There had been a long drought in the land, and yet, when the prophet offers his sacrifice before the priests of Baal, he pours out twelve vessels of water on the altar. Where did the prophet get the water to waste in this way? One look at the map will answer the question. Carmel is right on the sea-coast. And there is not a thing in the text to suggest that it was fresh water that Elijah used. The water came from the sea, and so while there is nothing we need marvel at in that, we cannot but marvel at the way in which some men make difficulties when they come to look at the sacred records.

One other illustration from the Old Testament will suffice. Voltaire scored what he thought a palpable hit when he referred to "the glasses and the fine linen" in Isaiah iii. 23. Glass, he said, was quite unknown in those days; but we now know that glass ornaments were worn by one of the Egyptian kings, Sesostris, and some ornaments dug up at Mycenae were of glass. But, the Revised Version uses the word, "hand-mirrors" for "glasses," and again the French sceptic is caught napping, for the mirror of the ancients was a disc of polished bronze

such as that referred to by Paul when he says, "Now we see in a mirror darkly."

Now turn to the New Testament. Amongst the papyri dug up we have a fragment of the Greek New Testament which is about a hundred years older than the earliest manuscript we had, and also a fourth century copy of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There is another valuable fragment giving some of the sayings of our Lord which he have in the Gospels, also some in more expanded form, and some that are quite new to us.

Other difficulties have been cleared up by additional evidence that has come to light. For example, the census-taking mentioned about our Lord's nativity was questioned by some. Dr. Moulton is our authority for saying that we have proof that a census was taken in the year A.D. 6, and that we know there was one taken in the year B.C. 8, which is accepted as the probable date of our Lord's birth. But that is not all. We have found some leaves from the journal of a Roman official, in which we read the rescript from an official in Egypt ordering every one to return to the country in which they usually lived so that a census could be taken within six weeks. Yet the chief difficulty was about Quirinius who was supposed to have taken the census at the time of the Nativity. Quirinius held the office of governor of Syria in A.D. 6, so how could he be concerned with taking the census, as Luke affirms, about B.C. 8? Was Luke mistaken in the name? Sir Wm. Ramsay has given us the answer. He dug up a stone which plainly states that Quirinius was specially sent to Syria at the time in question in order to take the census. Further,

Dr. Zumpt, an eminent scholar, has been able to demonstrate from facts he adduced that Quirinius was twice governor of Syria.

When Paul and Barnabas healed a lame man at Lystra, they were hailed with joyous shouts by the people, saying, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." Dr. Moulton points out a local tradition that throws a flood of light upon this incident. The legend tells how Zeus, the king of the gods, and Hermes once came to earth, but none of the people received them except two old folk who offered them hospitality. In return, the gods generously blessed the aged pair on their departure. So when this miracle had been wrought by Paul, the people evidently remembering the legend were determined that on this occasion the gods should be duly honoured, hence their wish to do sacrifice to the apostles.

From the papyri we learn that a man filling up the census form had to give, among other particulars, information of any scars or marks he bore that would serve for purposes of identification.

This is precisely what obtains in filling up one's passport for Europe to-day. Now here is an interesting sidelight on Paul's letter to Galatia. Later, when he had been stoned by the people of Lystra and left for dead, he recovered and went back to comfort the Christian community that was mourning for him. His words to it were, "We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." He would bear the marks of that evil day all his life, for the cruel flints would leave many a scar. So when he writes to the church of Galatia, reproving those who want to make a fair show



in the flesh, how does he close his letter? "From henceforth, let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

Thus we have not only tested truth, but time-attested truth; but look for a moment at

### THE BIBLE AS TIMELESS TRUTH

A piece of rope belonging to the Admiralty can always be detected no matter how long or how short the pieces, for it has a red strand running through it. The Bible is like that. Though it is a progressive revelation of the will of God, though the standard of the Old Testament is much lower than the New, and though there are some pitiable tales of mistakes and failure, yet right through the whole library runs this red strand of the Divine love and purpose. He is the same yesterday—and to-day, and though man's concept altered with time, God's character has been always that which our Lord revealed, though until the fulness of time that truth was not made clear.

The Bible contains the manifestation of the Divine glory in the Person of Jesus Christ. It contains too all that the soul needs for its comfort, guidance, salvation and sanctification. "Twice does a minister learn beyond question," says Dr. John Watson, "that the Bible contains the Word of the Living God. Once when he preaches the forgiveness of sins to the penitent, once when he sees a soul in the greater straits of life lifted, comforted, and filled with peace and joy." And one has seen the broken-spirited, the sin-smitten, the sorrow-stricken, the hopeless—those whose feet were tread-

ing the dark ways of life no less than those whose way lay through the Valley of the Shadow, find help and healing through the ministry of the Scriptures.

Nothing can be more idle than to ask if *all* other books are not inspired. Of course they are if they are "pure, lovely, and of good report," for God is the source of all good. But the proof of the Bible's unique inspiration is in the fact that it inspires man with the truth about himself, with the truth about life, with the truth about the unsearchable riches of Christ. Its message has been sifted, tested, even ridiculed by unbelief, but it remains the undiscredited revelation of God to man, and nothing can take its place nor wield the power it possesses. Within its covers the soul may find its Saviour, its solace, and its satisfaction.

Dr. Dale tells of a Japanese gentleman who was of such devout and noble temper that he became curious about him. Dale found that he had made many sacrifices in order to be a Christian, and at last he got from the man his story. He had been an earnest student of Confucius, and yet longed to know more of the benignant Being of whom Confucius sometimes seemed to write, yet whom in other places he seemed to deny, but his enquiries led only to unrest of heart. One day he came upon a Chinese Bible that he was advised to read, simply for its literary style. He commenced to read I Corinthians, and when he reached the thirteenth chapter, he was fascinated. "This man must have the light of heaven," he said. Then he turned to the Gospel of John, and so enraptured was he

as he read Christ's story that, to use his own words, "I could not refuse Him my faith."

So it is with every sincere mind that will read the book as though it were an ordinary book, to be read with ordinary interest and intelligence, remembering that it is more than a book; it is a collection of books. Such a one will soon discover that it is the most extraordinary book. It speaks the language of the heart: the heart of man as well as the heart of God, and all who give to it their honest attention, and bring to bear on its pages an enlightened mind, will find that it is indeed the Word of the Living God.

"We search the world for truth; we cull  
The good, the pure, the beautiful;  
And weary seekers of the best,  
We come back, laden from our quest,  
To find that all the sages said  
Is in the book our mothers read,  
And all the treasures of old thought  
In God's harmonious fulness wrought."

## VIII

### THE PROBLEM OF MIRACLES

**I**N a famous story, Ralph Connor describes a service held among the wild ranchers of the Albertas. It takes place in the tavern parlour, and it is all so fresh and unconventional that interest is awakened at once. We see the bronzed fellows sitting around on the benches with a background of bottles, and we are not in the least surprised when an interruption takes place. The minister had just finished reading the story of the Feeding of Five Thousand, when a cowboy before him asked that he would repeat the number of the people and the amount of food. The answer was given: five thousand people—five loaves and two fishes. Then with an air of finality the cowboy drawled, "Well, that's a little too unusual for me."

That rancher has many sympathisers to-day. Miracles were once felt to be of supreme help to faith. They pointed to the power of God. They proved the divinity of Christ. They made the soul sure that this was indeed the Anointed One because He wrought such wondrous works before the eyes of the astonished multitude. But to-day some feel the miraculous element in the Gospels is not a help but a hindrance. The modern man has heard so much about natural law that any interference with it is almost unthinkable. And the state-

ments of the scientist, more than the sneers of the sceptic, have left him with hardly a shred of faith in the miraculous. He admires the Master. He acknowledges the sublimity of His character, and the soundness of His teaching. But between the writers of the Gospels and those of some present-day articles, he hardly knows what to think.

Admittedly, the whole truth of the Gospels seems bound up with a belief in miracles. Then how can a man accept some statements about our Lord and reject others, and still retain his faith in the Christ of Christianity? Before setting out the grounds of possible belief in miracles, let us make this clear: We do not believe in Christ because of the miracles, but we believe in miracles because of Christ.

#### THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES

We can no more take away the element of the miraculous from the Gospels without impairing the glory of Christ than we can take a number of threads from a tapestry without marring the beauty of the design, for as Dr. Bruce points out, the miraculous "is no mere excrescence or external adjunct easily separable from the body of the history, but an essential portion of it, closely woven into the fabric, vitally connected with the organism. Words and works are so united that the one divorced from the other would in many cases become unintelligible." Thus the case is a serious one, the problem is of prime importance. It involves believing in Christ *and* miracles or disbelief in both.

Such an alternative does not trouble the Rationalist. He says quite frankly that he does not believe

in the possibility of miracles, urging as his warrant that the world is governed by laws that are inviolable. The progress of physical science, our extended knowledge of those laws, tend to strengthen his position, for miraculous intervention would seem to suggest imperfection in the Creator, and would introduce disorder. Thus, in an oft-quoted passage, Goethe says, "A voice from heaven would not convince me that water burned or a dead man rose again."

But we may pertinently ask, what are these natural laws? Before it is possible to say dogmatically that the universe is governed by immutable laws, we must be sure that we know everything about the universe and its control. If we do not—and the witness of the scientist is to the effect that we do not—then how can the Rationalist reasonably affirm that exceptions to the rule are impossible? The fact that something happens that we cannot explain, or happens only at rare intervals, is no proof that natural law has been broken. "The reasonable scientific view," says an eminent thinker, "is that a complete knowledge of nature would enable us to recognise the *rationale* of every event which ever occurred or ever can occur; and so it would seem to follow concerning any given apparent prodigy—either that it did not happen as related, or else that it happened in accordance with natural laws of which at present we are more or less ignorant."

We may therefore take it for granted that we have as yet but gathered a few shells on the strand of knowledge, and there is this further significant fact to note: the wisdom of the Eternal Mind is unsearchable. We do not know what is possible

or impossible when we come to the workings of the Almighty, except that we know there can be nothing inconsistent or self-contradictory in His acts. How then can we dogmatically assert that miracles are impossible? And if, as we hold, the Divine was incarnate in Jesus Christ, "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," who are we to block the road to faith with our chatter about natural laws?

We are continually interfering with some natural laws by introducing higher laws, but that does not necessarily mean disorder and chaos. Man builds a dam and alters the course of a mighty river. His cranes and pumps continually abrogate the law of gravitation. The physician finds a man in the grip of certain natural laws, and he sets out to render relief by working in accordance with other natural laws which supersede the former and restore health. The fact is that mind is superior to matter. Personality introduces a new power that can affect the natural order, and yet do it in the most orderly way. Let us put it in homely fashion. We saw an ant one day that had slipped into a bowl of water. It was battling for life, and as we watched, its struggles became gradually weaker. Natural law involved death from drowning. But just when it must have seemed that the end had come, we poured the water away. The ant remained for a little time, and then it slowly went on. A miracle had saved its life! Yet was it a miracle? To the ant, though the scriptural writer enlarges on its intelligence, and bids the sluggard learn a lesson from it, it meant nothing of the kind. If it knew anything about its experience it was just that it had been struggling in the water, and then that the water

was gone. The fact remains: there had been intervention. Some new power, acting in accordance with other natural laws of which the ant was entirely ignorant, had been operating on its behalf, and though the whole of ant-philosophy might contradict such a possibility, we can see how simple and natural the whole proceeding. The intelligence of the ant is marvellous, but compared with that of man it is infinitesimal. Is it not possible that there is at least as much difference between the mind of finite man and that of the Infinite?

If those who lived say a century ago could see the world as we know it now, they would be loud in their commendation of "miracles" that we regard as commonplace happenings. Suppose they heard one of the Atlantic aviators say in London, "When I was in America yesterday . . ." what would they think? And when told that the man was speaking sober truth, that he had flown through the air, how could they reconcile that with natural law? Or if they were shown a message received from a vessel in mid-Atlantic, or were told that by means of the telephone, they could talk with a friend in Paris, would they believe that the age of miracles is past? They are shown a photograph of a living man, revealing not only the bones of his body but some foreign substance, say a piece of metal embedded in the flesh, but never having heard of X Ray, it would tax their credulity to the full. And the wonderful properties of Radium with its age-long emanations, the wizardry of the chemist who extracts the delicate aniline dyes from the foul residues of coal, would leave them aghast at the



awful powers man's genius has discovered. All of which things are analogous.

The Creator of the universe may conceivably act in accordance with unknown laws that are yet as valid and natural as any we know. He is not necessarily contradicting Himself, nor is He interfering with the cosmic order of which we are so sure. It is just as probable that when the divine Son became incarnate, He too had power to work cures, to feed the hungry, to give sight to the blind and life to the dead, by obeying higher laws of which we know little or nothing. At least, if the Christian evangel be true, if Christ was indeed one with the Father, He was free and unfettered by the world He called into being. Pantheism is impossible for the thinking Christian; God is not imprisoned in His universe. Deism is equally unthinkable for those who hold that the Godhead is best known by the attributes of fatherhood. Given a God who is supreme, and a Saviour who is the eternal Son of God, we cannot deny the possibility of the miraculous, for after all, what we call the laws that govern the natural world are simply the result of our observation of that world over a comparatively brief period of its existence.

Spinoza's views on the possibility of miracles have often been cited. He lays down the proposition that "nothing happens in nature which is in contradiction with its universal laws." And that seems quite reasonable. But on closer examination we come to see that such a statement can be accepted only if we assume that everything—the power of God no less than the power that man wields—is included in his term, nature. We cer-

tainly cannot exclude God's working from the universe He has made, nor can we admit that such working must result in confusion and disorder. Were this the best of all possible worlds, it might be different, but we have to allow for the fact that through the misuse of man's powers of free will, through the thwarting of the divine purpose by sin, the world is far from perfect. Godet, called as a witness by Trench, is still worth hearing. "If nature as it now is be a sketch from which, with the concurrence of a free creation, a superior work will be brought out, wherein matter will be simply the organ and the reflection of the spirit, miracle is to the eyes of the thinker the early vision and anticipatory prelude of the new order of things. It is not a sum total, but an earnest."

With the object of raising man to the true plane of life, miracles were utilised for the divine ends, either by employing higher laws of which we are ignorant, or by some special spiritual intervention. So admitting that our knowledge is imperfect, that even in the world about us there are many things we cannot yet explain, we cannot deny the possibility of the miraculous in a universe in which God is supreme.

### THE CREDIBILITY OF MIRACLES

It is a matter of common knowledge that every wonderful teacher or man of outstanding personal gifts who played his part in the arena of the ancient world was often credited with the working of marvels. Thus pious legends gathered round the names of such men. Are we rightly to assume

that it is possible that the miracles of Jesus are also myths? We might, did we not believe in Him as the Eternal Son, and for this fact on which too much emphasis cannot be laid: the growth of such legends demands a considerable time, amounting to centuries. There was no such lapse of time in the case of Christ. Mark, the earliest of our Gospels, was written only about thirty years after the death of Jesus, but earlier still we have some of the letters of Paul which, while they do not specifically mention the miracles wrought, bear clearest testimony to One to whom such mighty works were possible, and who was Himself the Lord of life.

But as we have already said, it is impossible to separate the miraculous from the ministry of the Master. We have not only the witness of those who saw with their own eyes the wonderful working of His power, but we have also the combined effect that such works made upon both His friends and His foes. That the disciples were impressed goes without saying, for the more they saw of His compassion for the suffering and the stricken, the more they realised that Christ was One who did more than simply sympathise. That those who were the recipients of His bounty were the more ready to believe in His teaching is also easily understood. But the most significant witness to the miracles wrought is that of those who opposed Jesus, in season and out of season. These were not the untutored who might be readily imposed upon by subtle magic, nor were they willing to credit Him with supernatural powers He did not possess. On the contrary, they were the keenest minds of that day, bent on discrediting the new

Teacher because of His rigid opposition to their formal and pitiless religion.

What was their attitude? They did not deny that He wrought cures, that He did what no other man had done, that He possessed supernormal powers. They were witnesses to the possibility of miracles though without a thought that their very antagonism might serve to vindicate Christ. But they sought to explain His power by affirming that He was in league with the devil. They made no secret of the fact that He did possess miraculous powers, but by attributing them to evil influences they tried to diminish their value and to discredit the Worker. "This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." Christ took up the challenge. He asked them how a house that was divided against itself could hope to stand, and how, if Satan cast out Satan, such a course could be of service to the cause of evil? Then He turned to them with a further question, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."

That brings us to another point of interest. Suppose the Pharisees were right, what would be the character of such miracle working? Would it not be for the personal advancement of the worker or of his master? Yet when we scan the record of the Gospels we cannot get away from this fact, that Jesus refuses to work a miracle when it is merely to benefit Himself, as for instance, the turning of stones into bread in the wilderness, and that the powers He had were consistently employed

for the good of mankind. He will not gratify men's curiosity by a display of His powers when He knows that though He might thus prove His credentials as a divinely sent Teacher, their motive is simply to see what He can do. "The Pharisees came forth and began to question Him, seeking of Him a sign from heaven, tempting Him. And he *sighed deeply* in His spirit and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation."

This is surely very unusual. In the preceding verses He had just shown His power to satisfy the hunger of four thousand people. He had over and over again proved that He could do mighty works by the extraordinary powers He wielded over both organic and inorganic nature. What object had He in refusing to prove His divinity when proof was demanded, and what was the end He had in view in working miracles at all?

The answer depends entirely upon Christ's mission. He came into the world for the purpose of revealing the heart of God, and reaching the heart of man, and miracles served this twofold end. For one thing, in spite of all the prophets and psalmists had done, God remained largely the unknown and the unknowable. He was erroneously regarded as remote from the common affairs of human life, for He was the All-holy and the Awful. Thus the miracles wrought by our Lord tend not only to show that God is personal and powerful, sovereign over the natural world, but also that in character, He is as tender and compassionate as a mother. So we have not only the stilling of the tempest on the

Lake, but the quietening of those tempests that surge in the human heart. We see not only the five thousand and the four thousand fed in the hour of their need, but succour stretched out to a widow whose only son was being borne to his burial, and to a common beggar who incited only enough pity to ensure him having a stray copper flung in his direction. Not only is God seen to care for the sorrows and sufferings of humanity, but humanity itself is invested with a new value. The most loathsome leper, the humblest sufferer, the most obscure life shadowed with grief, are all the concern of the Eternal Love. We can no more believe in miracles without Christ as far as the New Testament is concerned, than we can believe in Christ without miracles, for He is the Divine Love incarnate, and all the pity of the Father's heart finds expression in the Son's actions.

This leads us to another important matter:

#### THE COMPATIBILITY OF MIRACLES WITH THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

Mrs. Humphrey Ward made a sensation some years ago with one of her books, "Robert Elsmere," for she there depicted one who, while he found himself less and less able to credit the miraculous, yet found himself more and more in love with the great Figure of the Gospels. But we maintain that such a position is not only a false one, but it is also needless. The miracles of the Master are at one with the whole spirit of His ministry, and are simply what He led men to expect when, in the Synagogue of His boyhood's home, He read the thrilling words of the ancient prophet, and applied

them to Himself. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor: He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." The Master and the miracles are indissolubly one. "They are so essentially a part of the character depicted in the Gospels," says Professor Illingworth, "that without them that character would entirely disappear. They flow naturally from a Person who, despite His obvious humanity, impresses us as being at home in two worlds."

That being so, we may well look at the two-fold function which miracles were meant to perform. Some of them seem to have been done simply out of sheer compassion for a soul in straits. No moral is attached to them; no advantage is taken of the kindly service rendered. But in other cases a definite lesson follows. The work of healing is followed by words of spiritual healing, addressed to the individual concerned, or to those who have been looking on.

While such deeds could not but point to Christ as the possessor of supernatural powers, and must give weight to His teaching, there is, however, another use to which Jesus put them, a use sometimes lost sight of in our discussions. They were the golden key that unlocked the door of the heart. Tennyson has reminded us that

"Truth embodied in a tale  
Shall enter in at lowly doors."

And if some of the most valuable lessons Christ taught were contained in His matchless parables, is it not equally true that He also used His miracles for the same end? Over and over again He supplies the physical needs of man only to point out deeper needs of the spiritual life of which the man is but dimly conscious. He heals the palsied man only to say to him and the critical onlookers, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." He recalls the feeding of the people that He may teach His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. And the man born blind receives his sight only later to be shown privately that his eyes look on the Son of God. Thus man's need of God's help that he may lead a full and complete life is demonstrated, and all the time, a track is being trodden that leads direct to the door of the soul.

There is more than physical good in every miracle Christ wrought. Every one of them is capable of spiritual interpretation, without in the least explaining them away. He gives sight to the blind that men may know there is spiritual blindness that He can remove, showing to their astonished eyes the glory of the Godhead. He cleanses the leper, demonstrating His power to cleanse the soul from the leprosy of sin. He restores the powers of healing and speech that men may understand that He can enable them to hear the Divine voice, and declare the wondrous ways of God. He delivers the possessed that He may teach men that their bodies ought to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. He heals the sick, comforts the sorrowful, gives power to the paralysed, that the truth may dawn on the soul that it is sick and needs holiness,



(for the terms health and holiness spring from the same root-word), that God is the source of comfort and of power to enable man to live aright. He feeds the multitude that they may understand that the soul's hunger can be satisfied only by the Bread of Life, and He turns water into wine to show how the Divine touch can transform the commonplace, and make even man's pleasure richer and more enjoyable. While at His word the dead are restored to life that all may realise that He is the Prince of Life, over whom even death and the grave cannot exert their spell.

“And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds  
In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
More strong than all poetic thought.”

Just as to-day the medical missionary often opens a door for the preaching of the Gospel, awakening interest in the tree of faith by first showing some of the ripe fruits of love and sympathy that grow there, so in the days of His earthly ministry Christ often found a way into lives that otherwise might have been barred by the strong bolts of prejudice. Sometimes, it is true, He seems to have been embarrassed by the popularity that some cure brought, but that must have been when people sought Him simply as a wonder-worker and not as the Revealer of God to men. At other times He was unwilling to work miracles because of the atmosphere of suspicion and unbelief in which He found Himself. Speaking broadly, the miraculous was made a means to the one end He had before Him. He came with a message to men: salvation was to

satisfy the deepest needs of the human heart, and they were to realise that none is beyond the reach of God's good grace, nor is anything impossible with God.

### THE CONTINUITY OF MIRACLES

If miracles were of such value as evidence of the divinity of Jesus, and if they conferred such blessings on mankind, how is it that the age of miracles is past? That is a question that many are asking. If "His touch hath still its ancient power," why do we not see that hand still stretched out to alleviate the suffering and remove the misery of men? The reply is that if they were employed mainly as a means of reaching the heart and commending the truth of the new revelation, their object has been gained. The use of symbols passes with growth in knowledge.

A child is first taught by means of pictures. It learns the alphabet by its blocks and books in which "A" stands almost invariably for apple, and "B" for ball, but as its mind develops, it readily grasps that those letters may stand for other things as well, and the larger meaning is conveyed to the mind. It learns to count with beads on a frame, or with its chubby fingers outstretched, but later, those means of reckoning pass. So it is with man in things spiritual. The Mosaic sacrifices and cleansings were but symbols of greater and more abstract things that could be apprehended only in the concrete. The symbols have been superseded; the facts remain.

There is no need for our Lord to ask men to believe that He is the Christ for the very work's

sake, if we limit His meaning to the miracles He wrought before them. Yet His appeal is still to His work. He points the enquirer to the changed lives that result from faith in His saving power. He is constantly acquiring new evidence of the benefits He has conferred upon the race. In every great movement of reform, His spirit has been manifested not only in the chivalry and heroism of the men who went forth to suffer for the right and to die for the sake of freedom, but also in the self-sacrificing service of that great multitude which no man can number who have given their strength and their sympathy to the stricken and the sorrowful. His healing ministry was not confined to the first century; it is going on still at the present day, for not only must we call in that divine example if we are to explain the devotion of the doctors and nurses in our hospitals but we must still make place for some of the forces our Master employed in His healing art.

Long ago, Dr. Bruce wrote, "It is conceivable that medical science may yet penetrate the secret of Christ's healing ministry, just as it is possible, and we may hope probable, that the causes and cures of such fatal diseases as cholera and consumption will yet be discovered. When that day comes moral therapeutics will be a recognised branch of medical art, and many of the evangelic "miracles" of healing will be miracles no longer, but natural cures; or at most it will be recognised that Jesus possessed in a remarkable degree powers over diseases having their roots in men's mental and moral nature, which in kind were common to Him with other men." That does not detract aught

from the real splendour of Christ's powers. It simply proves that just as His work of teaching has been continued through His church, so His work of healing has been committed to men whose gifts and whose skill are but part of the divine endowment. The powers of suggestion have been utilised with marked success in certain cases, and a record of some of the cures that have been obtained and of some of the operations that have been performed by our surgeons would amaze many people. It is true that these successes cannot be called miracles, for we know that they are the result of acting in accordance with certain known natural laws. But again we affirm that the true idea of our Lord's miracles is that they are in accordance with higher natural laws of which then people knew nothing, but of which to-day we have some knowledge. "The only thing that prevents our calling the whole operation a miracle," says Sir Oliver Lodge in another connection, "is that we are so thoroughly accustomed to the occurrence." And those words apply to the whole of the healing art as practised to-day.

That such work is going on, coupled with the comfort and counsel that are constantly reaching the human heart through the agency of men and women of God in the churches, removes the necessity for the precise type of miracle wrought by Jesus. And this remains to be said: His emphasis is always not on physical or material well-being, but on the spiritual. To demand a repetition of physical miracles is to misunderstand the whole purpose of our Lord's work. The man himself is more than either food or raiment, and though he were

to gain the whole world that would be a sorry bargain if he were to lose himself in doing it.

Christ proved His case. He revealed God as a free Spirit, supreme in the universe He created. He revealed the divine heart as full of loving pity and yearning solicitude for the souls of men. God is still intervening in His own way, giving strength to the weak, aiding the tempted to overcome the habits and allurements of evil, helping the soul to triumph over circumstances and to realise the value of communion and dependence upon the unseen. Is not that miracle enough? As Coventry Patmore sings:

“Be not amazed at life; 'tis still  
The mode of God with His elect,  
Their hopes exactly to fulfil  
In times and ways they least expect.”

Though God may hide His tracks or seem to be indifferent to the trials and troubles of the race, He has put within the reach of man the power to work mighty wonders in the world, to cure some of the ills that flesh is heir to, and to remedy many of the evils and injustices under which the race groans.

So with the possibility of miracles, their credibility, their compatibility with the character of Christ, and their continuity though in different guise, man need let the problem of miracles trouble him no longer. With God all things are possible!

“Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.”

## IX

### THE PROBLEM OF THE ATONEMENT

IT is not our view of the Atonement that saves us," says Professor Peake, "and it would be an evil day for the future of Christianity when the acceptance of a particular theory of the work of Christ should be made necessary to salvation." With this statement of one of the soundest and sanest of our theologians most of us will agree. Yet we have a feeling that on this sacred mystery it were better to be silent. Discussion of the details of our Lord's passion seem out of place, as much out of place as the thoughtless chatter of a garrulous school-girl might be as we stood, awe-struck and dumb, upon the snow-clad Alpine heights, watching the splendid sovereign of the day pierce the morning mists and transform the vast solitudes with his aureate smile. Wonder wraps the soul about. Speech seems sacrilege. We stand in the presence of God Himself, and the very stones beneath our feet seem holy ground.

But on such a theme silence may be more profane than speech. There are some who would fain know the meaning of this mysterious light, the light of love divine, that breaks on the dark world of man's sin, and because their words are not idle chatter, but the language of the soul in straits, can we be

unmindful? Can we bid such who stand in the crowd about the cross simply to look up in silent adoration? For these are sincere seekers of the solution by which alone peace may be possible.

“Why should God allow His son to suffer for us? If it violates my sense of justice for an innocent man to be punished that I may go scot-free, how can it satisfy the Eternal Justice? It does not seem right!” So spake one who was striving to reconcile his own moral sense with some of the theories of the Atonement he had heard. And while, happily, as Professor Peake points out, “Is it not our view of the Atonement that saves us,” unhappily, the lack of a definite view leaves us on the brink of despair. Learned discussions of the “Penal satisfaction” theory, that of moral influence, or the mystical theory, may yet leave us still wandering amid a maze of words, when our hearts are longing for the Father’s word of forgiveness, and our weary feet would fain rest in the Father’s house.

Now to us, the glory of the gospel is that it is the unveiling of the Father’s face. God was the unseen, and largely the unknown. Man felt that there was a Power above him. He had seen the Divine handiwork in the stars that decked the midnight sky, and in the gorgeous flowers that turned their faces to the morning sun. He had seen the mighty works of the Eternal in the mountains that lifted their hoary heads to the clouds and in the waters that rolled in solemn majesty upon the shingly beach. And when the tempest rent the hills or lashed the waves of the sea into boisterous fury, when the thunders rolled and the

lightnings flamed, then to man's heart the Eternal was also the Awful.

But the majesty of the Most High became overwhelming as man realised that the Framers of the universe was also a Holy God, while man knew himself to be unholy. He had broken the Divine commands. It was clear as day to him that he had chosen other ways than those in which God would have him walk, and so again we note how "Conscience does make cowards of us all." The old story of Genesis makes this plain. With terror-stricken faces, man's first parents hid themselves from Him they had disobeyed, and to the divine question Adam replied, "I heard Thy voice in the garden and I hid myself, for I was afraid."

Why had man formerly enjoying the fellowship of his Maker thus altered his attitude to God? What had changed trust to dread? It is answered in one word, sin. The face of God had been clouded over not by wrath but by grief, and that cloud obscured the light of happiness in which man had delighted. Thus from that time on, the human heart looked on God as One who was to be feared. He was powerful; man was weak. He was high and holy; man was of the earth, earthy. This feeling deepened with time. As man's conscience became more enlightened, he became more conscious of his shortcomings. He saw more of the gulf that lay between what he ought to be and what he was, and so the record of human life presents to us that pitiable spectacle: God who is love ineffable regarded as wrath insatiable.

If this be a correct impression of the human state prior to the advent of our Lord, it will



explain some of the views that still persist, yet while we make allowance for the error of men who lived before Christ's day, it is passing strange that the fuller light, instead of dispelling all mistaken ideas, seems to have blinded some men by its very brilliance, and instead of being brought nearer to God, they have felt that Christ had to stand between them and the wrath of the offended Lawgiver, receiving on His innocent head the out-poured vials of wrath.

Origen and Irenæus had propounded a theory that Christ had to sell Himself to Satan in order to effect man's release. Anselm had taught that Christ paid the debt that man owed to God. But we may pertinently ask, was that the view Christ took of His own sacrifice, or was it the construction the Apostles put on it? It was not. There was no anger to be appeased so that God would be propitiated. Paul's word is decisive. He says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Dr. Stalker is but echoing the same word when he affirms, "In the Scriptures the Atonement is always represented as the Father's work which the Son undertakes at His wish. Likewise, Jesus is equally concerned with the Father in maintaining the integrity of the divine character and the honour of the divine law."

This is the poles apart from the view that some of us have heard from our youth up. We admitted to ourselves that God must be obeyed, but it was obedience that men would offer to a tyrant, knowing that a breach of the command would mean relentless punishment. Instead of a God of infinite love and unutterable solicitude for man's good,

we have rather thought of One somewhat like the pitiless Nebuchadnezzar who ordered that if men would not pay homage to the golden image he had set up, then they should be cast into a fiery furnace. The pity of it is that in some quarters such ideas still rule, for the cross is not the proof of God's tender love for man, but simply the means by which He is placated.

We come to grips with the problem. Why did Christ die? If there was no awful anger to be appeased, why was it necessary? Or if God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, what becomes of some of the theories? The fact is:

#### GOD IS THE FIRST TO FEEL MAN'S SINFULNESS

In the atonement, Christ shows God's character, which is holy love. Yet because He is both holy and loving, He must hate sin. It is more than an offence against His law; it is a grief to His heart. Thus we get a deeper idea of what man's transgression means. He cannot look on the evil ways of mankind with easy tolerance. What we thoughtlessly indulge or vainly excuse means heart-break to God. Yet there are some who speak lightly of Eden's temptation and fall as though it were a very small thing after all, and as though it were scarcely fair that mankind should be under a curse simply because one creature pulled the fruit from the forbidden tree. That is an entirely false position. The story of Eden puts before the mind of the race in a most dramatic form the indisputable fact of sin. We have all been driven forth from the Garden of Innocence not by the flaming sword of

a wrathful Deity, but by that of our own conscience, for knowing a thing to be wrong we yet did it. It was no accident. We did it of set purpose, for already moral responsibility had dawned. "Sin is the deliberate and wilful act of a free agent who sees the better and chooses the worse, and thereby acts injuriously to himself and others. . . . When fully developed it involves moral suicide." So runs the able definition given by Sir Oliver Lodge. Man had there in the Genesis story a choice of obeying God or his own desires. He chose the latter and fell. The same choice confronts man in every age, and when he knowingly breaks the law of God, no matter whether we call it "a fall upwards" or not, he has left innocence behind him.

This law of God is not merely a prohibition meant to limit the freedom and happiness of His children. It is the safeguard of both. It is meant to bring to him the blessedness that God intended, and, like the laws of health, obedience results only in good, while a breach of those laws means misery and suffering. No parent can look on his child cutting himself off from the pure and good without concern. Then can the Heavenly Father who sees so clearly the real nature of good and evil look passively on while His offspring does the wrong?

That is not all. Every sin of ours is not only an infringement of the law that brings good; it is a defiance of the Law-giver. The creature sets itself up against the better judgment of the Creator. The subject defies the authority of the Sovereign. The child sets at nought the counsels of its father who is not only the all-wise, but the all-good. Can any king worthy of the name allow rebellion to run

its riotous course without taking measures to suppress the rebels and re-establish order? Such a king would cease to rule. Can the true father allow his son to ignore his commands as though they were of no account? Such a father would cease to be the custodian of his child's happiness. So, if God is the All-holy One and the Supreme, whether as the world's Law-giver or the Father of our souls, sin must be checked, and the punishment which accompanies wrong-doing must be met, for God being God, cannot be unmindful of man's ways.

This much the Atonement makes clear. God's condemnation of human sin must find expression, and both that condemnation and the justice of God's demands must be acknowledged by the wrong-doer if he is ever to find his rightful place at the Father's board. Yet God is the perfect being, and being more than holiness—being holy love, to repeat Dr. Newton Clarke's memorable phrase—He must love the sinner in spite of his sin. Again we need to be on our guard lest we interpret the divine character according to our own limited ideas. Love is not the weak, mawkish sentiment that some novelists depict. It does not mean the easy-going tolerance that an indulgent parent sometimes shows to his idolised and spoiled child, enabling it to do just what it pleases, thus making it a nuisance both to itself and to every one about it. God is love, it is true, but His love cannot look on man's life, ruined by evil, without hating the thing that has wrought such havoc in the soul. It is love that burns at white heat. It purifies and refines the good qualities in character, but the base it must consume. It is the divine counterpart of the incinerators that are found

outside our big cities. They are the safeguards of human welfare. All the rubbish and vile refuse is brought thither that the fire may do its work. Then when all that is bad has been destroyed there is only a white ash remaining, fair to the eye and harmless to the life.

So it is God's regard for the health of the soul that makes love's fires burn so pitilessly till all man's sins are consumed, but because His love is divine, while it loathes the sin it must hold the sinner dear. We need to recall this fact in these days: The motive of the Atonement is love, not hate. As the late Dean Farrar used to say: "The work of the Atonement, as the work of the blessed Trinity, and as being the result of the love not of the wrath of God, ought to have been a sufficient warning against the hideous extravagance of those forensic statements of the Atonement which have disgraced almost a thousand years of theology." So if love is the mainspring of God's redemptive work, it follows that He must give His best to the object on which His affection is set.

That is true of all love worthy of the name. In the case of man and maid, love finds expression in giving. It may be only a flower, a book, a trifle that yet shows like a straw the direction of the breeze, but that is followed by the jewelled pledge of devotion, costly as the purse will permit. And the devotion itself—that is a more costly thing. For the sake of love, a man will toil long and laboriously at desk or bench through the long hours. Love of wife and weans will keep him steadily at his task when his own inclination is to abandon it. It will nerve him for a sustained struggle through

the years when he feels that the coveted success, of which in the bright hours of youth he fondly dreamed, is beyond him. And by the human we may in some measure interpret the divine. Love that is love must give its best.

The same thing is apparent in a mother's devotion to her children. All through the evening hours even as through the day, that heart is giving forth its love. She has been working to make home a haven of rest for her husband, as well as a place of glee for her children, and when they are quiet in bed, she will take her basket of mending and with willing if weary fingers she stitches and contrives so that the heat may not be burdensome or the cold too intensely felt. But should one of those children be sick, she will take her place by the bed that she may minister to the need of her little one, and to the exacting duties of the day she will often add the vigil of the night. It is another illustration of the same law: love must give.

From the fields of Flanders may be culled another rare bloom that also witnesses to the truth. We heard of two fellows of the Camerons who had enlisted and trained together, and who after a stiff day near Ypres lay wounded in No Man's Land. One of them was only slightly hurt, but he saw that his friend was in a more serious way. There was little chance of getting him back, and the badly wounded man asked, "D'ye think they'll find us the nicht, Jock?" He was referring to the stretcher-party. "'A dinna ken, lad, but 'A ken this fine—you and me'll stick thegither." Night had fallen, and the teeth of the stricken lad were chattering

with the cold, so without any more ado, his friend rolled over, and taking off his own great-coat, he spread it over the other. Then they lay in the blackness of the night. The next morning at day-break, the stretcher-bearers found the two men lying side by side. One of them had two great-coats; the other had none. But both of them were dead from exposure. "Greater love . . ." At least love was proved to be powerful enough to make this sacrifice, for again we affirm: love must give.

Can we not find a parallel between these homely instances of human affection and the love of God? Christ plainly teaches us that though there is a span as wide as that which divides the heavens and the earth between the love of God and the love of man, yet there is a similarity that enables the one to interpret and understand something of the other. In a word, what is true of man at his best is even more gloriously true of God, though the depths of that love none may sound. To quote Professor Peake again, "The death of Christ could never have taken place had not God's attitude to mankind been one of yearning love." God was the first to feel the sin and sorrow of His children. Their rebelliousness like that of Absalom stabbed the Father's heart. He saw how evil was corroding the soul, defiling the garments, marring the divine likeness, and because He so loved the world, He gave His only-begotten Son. While the Son stooped to the sorrows and sins of humanity, identifying Himself with the lost, it was because the Father first felt the degradation and despair that had fallen upon the souls He had made.

“O loving wisdom of our God!  
 When all was sin and shame,  
 A second Adam to the fight  
 And to the rescue came.

And that a higher gift than grace  
 Should flesh and blood refine,  
 God's Presence and His very Self,  
 And Essence all-divine.”

### GOD WAS THE FIRST TO FIND THE WAY OF RECONCILIATION

In the Atonement, Christ lays bare the love of God for the lost. We have pointed out what a burden sin must be to the good Father; it had turned man's mirth into mourning. It had brought sorrow and gloom where there ought to have been sunshine and light. So because God is holy love, He cannot but take the burden of His children's sin upon His heart. If He cares, then He shares, and as He was the first to feel the sorrow of separation, He was the first to find the way to reconcile the world unto Himself.

How could man be reached? How could it be proved to him that the Father yearned over the prodigal; estranged and exiled, and longed for his return? It could be done only by God bending His back to the burden of His creatures' sin. It could be only by personally identifying Himself with the loved yet the lost. There is an incident in the history of early missionary effort that makes this plain. A missionary who went forth to reach some people in slavery found that between himself and them there were almost insuperable barriers.



For one thing he was white like their oppressors, and then they were driven out so early in the morning, and came back to their miserable hovels so late at night, smarting with the lash of their masters or broken by the toils of the day, that they could not listen to his words about the loving God. So this gallant soul resolved on a difficult course. He went back to the coast. He took his place in the slave-market and was sold into captivity like the other poor wretches who came under the hammer. He marched with them in the dismal column that headed for the interior. He was driven forth with them while the dew was still on the ground, and with them he toiled under the blistering sun. The cruel whip that drank its fill of their blood scored his back, and at nightfall he was herded with them in their wretched quarters. Then they began to understand him better, even as he began to understand them. He was one of them. When he told them of the Son of God who in even more wonderful fashion "took on Him the form of a servant," when he told them of the love divine that went the way of the cross, then they took in the significance of the message that had cost him so much to bring, and that had cost God even more.

Christ came to identify Himself with man in his need. He was born of poor parents that He might be undivided from the mass of mankind by reason of His position or possessions. He toiled for His daily bread. His love drove Him into the lowest haunts that He might find the lowest of the low; and living the life of the harassed and troubled, He proved to them beyond doubt that He was one with them because one of them. He trod

the ways of life as other men and yet as no other man ever did, for while they turned aside from the right and stumbled in the miry places that skirt life's road, He kept His garments undefiled. The culmination of that life was the cross.

There was no other way for God to take. In face of the tragedy of man's sin no matter what it might cost, love must seek to redeem the soul from destruction. We know that the purer the heart, the more loathsome must sin appear. The more loving the heart, the more it feels for the one who has erred. It is not the thoughtless youth, sowing his wild oats, who realises most the gravity of his wrong-doing; it is the father or mother who knows that defilement coupled with disgust must result, and a bitter harvest will have to be reaped. While God had made man a moral being, free to choose evil or good, responsible for the choice he made, yet God's love and pity must suffer with the sinner in his sin. That means paying the price.

Now that very phrase is the battle-ground of many a belief. What do we mean by paying the price? The common idea of the Atonement has been that God refused to treat with sinners until they had satisfied the demands of outraged justice, though, being helpless and lost, this was precisely just what they could not do. So Jesus had to step in to take the place of the sinner. He saw the prisoner at the bar, and with the consent of the judge, the man who had pleaded guilty was released while the innocent was sentenced to death. The argument is that this perfectly righteous man would do quite well as a victim, and the law would then be satisfied.

Some one had to suffer; it did not matter whether it was the right man or not. The price must be paid!

Would that be permissible in any court of earth's justice? Decidedly not. The whole arrangement of our courts is to guard against an innocent man being punished for the offence of another, and at the same time to ensure that the guilty must pay for his wrong-doing. We may take it that it is this view, still held by many outside our churches, that makes a man feel that God is not strictly impartial. But we ask, if such a procedure is beneath the level of man's sense of justice, can it possibly be satisfactory to God? It is unthinkable. Guilt cannot be transferred in that way without doing violence to the divinely implanted instincts within us. And though it is true that the New Testament gives us various types by which the sacrifice of our Lord may be understood, it is only that such a demonstration of infinite love and pity may be the better grasped by finite minds. The lamb might be slain, or the sins of the people might be confessed over the head of the scapegoat, but that is an expression of the soul's guilt, not a transference of it.

If God needs no appeasing, if there is no fierce anger to remove, why then need Christ pay the price? To whom did He pay the price? He did not pay the price to God: it was God who in His Son was Himself paying the price of man's redemption rather than paying a fine that he might be released from the hands of justice, for if caring is bearing, then bearing the burden means sharing. That is where the cost comes in.

When the shepherd found that one of his sheep was missing, two courses were open to him. He

could either write it off as a loss that might be expected in sheep-farming or if he decided to go after it, then he must pay for its recovery. Pay whom? That comes out in Christ's story. It was more than a sheep; it was *his* sheep, and so to reclaim it, he leaves not only the ninety-nine, but also the rest and quiet that the close of the day should have brought.

The woman who lost the piece of silver might have let it go, or she might have waited until it turned up, but it meant more to her than its face value. It was probably part of her dowry, and so she turned the house inside out, moving the furniture, sweeping in every corner till the coin came to light.

The man whose son had gone wrong might have solaced himself with the thought that though one had proved undutiful, he still had another son on whose obedience and diligence he could count. It was not the father's fault that the younger had kicked over the traces. Every chance had been given to him. He had been well brought up. He had been surrounded with good influences, and many a time the father had counselled him that he might be spared some of the bitter lessons of experience. But the lad had regarded it as so much "preaching," and though his father might mean well, he was really, in the young man's estimation, incompetent to give advice. What did he know of the big world outside? Why, so far back as the son could remember, his parent had never been farther afield than the next town. Then what could he know of the supposed allurements and temptations on which he so fondly enlarged?

Such arguments have a very familiar sound. Some of us have used them to silence the better self as it lodged its protest. We were able to take care of ourselves. We knew just how far to go and when to stop. Alas! but we went farther than we intended, and the far country was not as difficult to reach as we imagined.

There is another phase of these parables to which we would do well to pay heed. It shows us at once just how redemption exacts a price, although in the maze of theological terms we may have wandered from the humanness of God and the divineness of His sacrificial love. We have mentioned that Origen held that Christ paid a ransom to the devil that man might be freed from his dominion, and that, in a revolt from such a position, Anselm held that the price was paid to God. The Reformers, unwilling to accept either statement, made the price to be the sufferings of our Lord which God was willing to accept in place of punishing the sinner. But Paul has been overlooked in this: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." And the price was not paid to God, but paid *by God*.

The shepherd returns from his weary search upon the hills, bearing the sheep upon his shoulders. The shepherd is glad; his sacrifice has not been in vain, but it has been real enough. As you look into his face, even the satisfaction there cannot banish the fatigue written large upon it. He has spent the night scouring the crags and hollows of the hillside, and not only has he added that to the labours of his long day, but as one looks at his sandals cut and torn by the sharp flints, and his legs and arms,

scratched and bleeding where he forced his way through tangled paths, one begins to realise that his was no easy task. When he had at last located the lost sheep, cowering in fear upon the rocky ledge to which it had slipped, the shepherd had to lower himself down to the spot, and by almost superhuman efforts get the foolish animal back to a place of safety. So the shepherd paid the price. To whom? To no one, but in the completion of his work of mercy. He had sacrificed himself.

The woman sought and found her silver coin, but she also had paid the price. She was glad, of course, and very thankful to restore it to its place, for she would have felt it a lasting reproach to have let it go, but it meant moving every chest and case, every piece of furniture beneath which it might have rolled, before she succeeded in her quest. And when she calls her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her in the recovery of the coin, they are the first to remark how tired she looks.

What of the old father who for so long had been waiting and watching, praying and planning for the return of the prodigal? It has meant something to him. It is only when you see his face in repose that you note how he has aged, and how the lines of care have deepened on the brow. His form is not quite as erect as it was. His hair is whiter than a few months ago when the lad left home. And no one knew what agony of soul the long hours of the night had witnessed, nor how often unable to sleep, he had left his apartment and mounted to the roof that he might look along the track, just showing ghostly and grey in the chill dawn. The friends who came to the wel-

come-home feast had spoken of this under their breath. Yes, it was all very well for the son to come back now he had sown his wild oats, and to be fêted in this way, but he had nearly broken the old man's heart; his father would never be the same again. The fact is, the father had been realising what a tremendously costly thing redemption is. He too had paid for his son's recovery. To whom—to his son's accusers, to his tempters, to the devil? None of these seem to satisfy the heart. Because he could not help but love, he could not help giving all he had—his prayers, his sympathy, his tears. He would have given his own life to save the lad, for one seems to hear his voice choked with emotion echoing the words of another father, "Would God I had died for thee, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom!"

Of course, in our modern way of looking at things, we may very well ask if all this was worth while. After all, the shepherd might have been wiser in looking after the ninety-nine and in not jeopardising his own health and life. One piece of silver does not seem worth so much trouble, and the woman's delight at its recovery seems out of all proportion to the value of the coin. Even this young fool who thought he knew better than his father might have been left to learn sense. He might be trusted to come back as soon as he realised what he had left behind, so why should the father break his heart over him? Was he worth it? Yet that is just our Lord's point. The soul does not seem worth it. Why should the Infinite Love, begirt by pure beings who have never sinned, concern itself above the souls of men? Because God is in-

finite love He must. He cannot look lightly on man's sin, we repeat, but neither could He rest content while a son of His heart companied with the swine when he was meant for sonship. The situation had to be met. God's righteousness demanded that sin should be condemned and forsaken, and that man should endorse that condemnation. Christ becoming identified with the lost race offered a sacrifice that meant the condemnation of sin. In His sufferings in life and on the cross, He showed what God felt about sin, but He also showed what God felt about the sinner: that holy love and justice cannot be separated in the Divine nature, and that what God desires more than anything else is that sin, thus condemned, should be stripped of its glamour and power of appeal, and that man should turn back to the Father that reconciliation might be effected through this one Mediator.

"Observe," writes Sir Oliver Lodge, "that the influence at work is exerted wholly on man. The attitude of God has changed no whit; there was never any hostility to be washed out in blood; He felt no wrath at the blind efforts of men struggling in the mire from bestial to human attributes; there was nothing to appease. But there was plenty to reveal: an infinitude of compassion, an ideal of righteousness, the inevitableness of law, the power of faith, a real not a mechanical salvation, no legal quibble, but a deep eternal truth."

So the Son of God became one with the lost that He might be the Saviour of the lost. It meant the sacrifice of Himself, but the price He paid that man might be reconciled to God was the price that love must pay for the highest good of the beloved,



and because it was the love of God for the sin-enslaved, then love made its supreme sacrifice. In the incarnate Christ, God's love is declared. He must take notice of man's rebellion and sin, for these are antagonistic both to the divine character and to human good, but in thus sacrificing Himself, Christ condemns sin in the flesh and pays honour to the justice of God's law. He does more than that. He lays bare the heart of God Himself; He shows what God is, and what man was meant to be, yea, what man by grace may become. It is not only man that suffers because of sin; it is God who suffers that He may save. Christina Rossetti sings:

“Lord, dost Thou care? . . .  
Yea, for Thy gain and loss I cared so much  
It brought Me to the cross.”

So God is not only the first to feel man's sin and the first to find the way of reconciliation, but

#### GOD IS THE FIRST TO FORGIVE

In the Atonement Christ reveals how the divine Love is victorious. The cross is the culmination of God's search for His erring child, even as it is proof that love and not anger is the dominant power in the divine nature. It is thus that all opposition on the part of man may be overcome. You may recall the lines of Francis Thompson, that strange waif of the world. In “The Hound of Heaven,” he tells of the foolish way in which man has tried to elude God, and how at last love tracks him down.

“I fled Him down the nights and down the days,  
I fled Him down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind, and in the midst of tears

I hid from Him . . . I sped . . .  
 From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
 But with unhurrying chase  
 And unperturbed pace,  
 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
 They beat—and a voice beat  
 More instant than the Feet—  
 ‘All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’ ”

Now, strange though it may seem, that is one of the first things that has to be done in reclaiming the lost: men have to be convinced that God seeks them. Sin has a terrible effect upon the heart. It hardens it and perverts the judgment. So men have come to think that God can have only one object in searching for them. It is that His retributive anger may flame out, and that they may be punished for not only their known breach of His law, but also for the sins of Adam. But Christ overcomes this prejudice by placing the divine love in a new light. Threats will not make a stubborn sinner forsake his sin, but entreaties may. Thus love conquers. The Psalmist uses a singular idea: “Thy gentleness has made me great,” and, in reality, it is the gentleness of grace that makes the vilest see the extent of his wrong-doing, and the grief it has brought to God’s heart. The cross focussing the rays of redemptive love upon hearts of ice, melts them so that the waters of repentance may flow out, and the healing waters of forgiveness may flow in to cleanse and restore.

Potentially, all men are forgiven, though actually they may still be estranged from God. Any barriers that still exist are all on man’s side, none on God’s, for the cross shows that Paul was indeed right: The cross was first set up not on Calvary, but

in the heart of God. We may not understand such love; that does not invalidate the fact of it. "Centuries before Augustine and Anselm speculated," says Dr. Fairbairn, "the cross had proved itself to be the power and wisdom of God; and their speculations were but attempts to find a theory that would explain the fact."

When war was raging between America and Britain, the prior of a religious fraternity came to General Washington to intercede for the life of a man condemned to death. He had been charged with treason and found guilty. Washington listened to the entreaties of the prior and then said, "The state of public affairs demands the severest measures against traitors and spies or I would gladly release your friend." "My friend?" replied the prior, "he is not my friend. The fact is, he is the only enemy I have, but I have forgiven him that, and want to save him if I can." That is the kind of forgiveness God has extended to the race. "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son." It was God's way, the only way of showing to man the divine heart as it is, man's life as it may be, and sin in its deadly effects. Shakespeare sums this up in a pregnant passage:

"Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once;  
And He that might the vantage best have took  
Found out the remedy."

The sinful life becomes impossible for the soul that has seen the grief of God reflected in the face of Jesus. Sin has been robbed of its most subtle power, that of charm. For so perverted have our minds

become that we have had a feeling of admiration for the man who has "seen life." The novelist and dramatist have frequently followed the same line, making evil to be a great adventure, and the villain to be a kind of dashing dare-devil fellow, handsome of face, and attractive in person. Looking on that lonely Figure, kneeling amid the fretted moonlight of the Garden, bearing its weight of the world's woe in solemn anguish, these things appear different. When we see Him lifted on the cross, a malefactor on either side, making a spectacle for the surging holiday crowd, we cannot but feel that if this is God's judgment on man's wrong-doing, then Christ has broken the spell of sin, and the best in man's heart strives for mastery.

Thus love is triumphant. The heart is opened to the light of the Father's purpose. The doors of the prison have been flung open and the captive is led forth under the blue sky of God's grace. His eyes are blinded by the strong light, for he has long been groping in his gloomy cell. He had thought of God as justice alone, and the ordinary conception of Justice is that it ever confronts man with bandaged eyes and the sword and scales. But the eyes of God are those of love. He sees man as he is; but He sees also what in Christ man can become. The clay may be common, but in the hand of the divine Potter it may be shaped anew into beauty and usefulness. When the light of love plays upon the soul, then new glories are awakened, and as the evening sun may turn a wayside puddle into gleaming gold, or the light of the moon make that reed-bound lake look like a mirror of silver set in a frame of bronze, so the radiant face of Christ

is reflected in the new race to which redemption gives birth. The cross is the consummation of God's love, the condemnation He utters on human wilfulness and sin, and the pledge He makes to man that on the divine side every barrier has been razed.

During the fierce struggle that took place for the village of Monchy in France, the guns of both sides almost obliterated the place, but strange to say, though houses and shops were rent and torn by bursting shells, the cross in the centre of the market-place stood intact. When the village at last passed to the Allies, the cross stood alone, and with the utility that marks modern warfare it was turned to account. First, the name of the place was chalked on it, so that those who were directing operations might know just where they were. Then an index-hand was chalked on one of the extremities, pointing the road that led to our advanced position. While the Royal Engineers, who were laying a telephone line, carried their wire over the arms of the cross. At first it may strike the average mind that there was something of reverence lacking in such a use of a sacred emblem. But one has only to think for a moment to see how rich in suggestiveness the whole thing may be. That cross showed our men where they were. It pointed out to them where they were to go. It was made a means of communication, so that orders might reach them, and messages from their commander might be transmitted.

Is it not so with the cross of Calvary? It has revealed to the heart of man where he really is. It has shown him the way he ought to go. But it has also been God's means of speaking to him, helping him to understand that though his own ways

have been foolish and grave, the love of God remains unchanged, and there is nothing at which divine love will stop in order that it may accomplish its object and have the prodigal restored through repentance and redemption's mighty appeal.

Here then is the answer to our question, a solution to the problem, Why did Christ die? God who is the all-holy cannot ignore the fact of sin—He is the first to feel. God who is holy-love, must show love in perfection—He is the first to find the way of reconciliation. God whose love is all-conquering shows that the cross is the key that opens the way to a new life of glad fellowship—He is the first to forgive. The sacrifice was offered that the soul might find expression for its penitence and that the just demands of God's laws might be honoured. The Saviour was manifested that in thus identifying Himself with the race, the race might identify itself with Him as the Head of a new humanity. The reconciliation was effected that by faith, sin's power might be destroyed, and the power of grace might fling open to the world-weary sons of man the Father's home with its new life of filial love and triumphant trust.

Then what becomes of the Scriptural references to the wrath of God? The fact of His righteous indignation is not questioned, nor His anger minimised, but such wrath is directed against iniquity indulged in in spite of His declared will, and sin persisted in in defiance of His offers of mercy. It is when there is flagrant and wilful continuance in wrong-doing that the sacrifice of His Son is made of none effect, and "because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience."

## X

### THE PROBLEM OF PERSONALITY

WHAT is man?" The question is an old one. We find it on the lips of the Psalmist, and it is echoed by the philosopher and the psychologist. The answers are as varied as they are inconclusive. There is something about personality that baffles analysis.

To the ancient writer of Israel, man, compared with the Infinite, was infinitesimal. He looked at the magnificent canopy of midnight, like a gorgeous vestment sparkling with jewels, and even with his limited knowledge of the heavens, it seemed almost incredible that the Almighty should be concerned with the frail creatures He had made. Yet some glimmering of the divine glory imprisoned in human souls was seen, for the Psalmist goes on to describe man as but "a little lower than the angels," though he himself may remain a mystery.

Man's divine origin and affinities need to be reaffirmed, for the standard of values has changed. The cynic's sneer as he looks at the frailties and foibles of the race need not be taken too seriously. His comment is, "Lower than the angels! Yes, a good deal lower—lower than the beasts that perish." But the materialist looks at man simply as a wealth-producing machine to be run at the minimum cost, the maximum speed, and then discarded. While

man himself, beaten in life's struggle or hemmed in by circumstances, feels himself to be a helpless cog in that machine, forced to revolve until worn out, and then to be flung on the scrap-heap. Men are asking the old questions with a new bitterness. The only answer seems to be: Man is a mere pawn in the game; he is less than the dust of the balance. He simply does not count.

Still, that is not the Christian position. The Son of Man put a hitherto unknown value upon the individual. Parable, precept, parallel, are alike employed to demonstrate the preciousness of man to God. If a sparrow is not beneath the divine notice can a single child of the Father be forgotten? If the lilies are clothed, and the ravens fed, shall the needs of the divine offspring go unsupplied? So from the lower plane to the higher Christ proceeds. His life of service and His death of sacrifice show not only what God is to man, but what man is to God. Frail and faulty, defiled and degraded, he is yet capable of much. He has gifts and talents entrusted from above. There are depths of love and heights of attainment made possible by grace. There are powers of thought and action that puzzle the most careful observer we have produced. Only God fully comprehends the wonder and worth of the creature made in the divine image, for while his lot may be obscure, his powers relatively puny, he is still God's son.

Though we say that only God can fully comprehend man, that does not debar man from trying to understand himself. He has been striving for a long time to probe the mystery and solve the problems of personality. He is more than mortal. We



all know that. We may go into an anatomical museum and look upon a row of glass jars containing all that is mortal in man—the exact quantities of water, iron, silica, and lime, that go to make up the human body, yet we need not be told that the man himself is not there. When Crito asked Socrates how they should bury him, he replied, “In any way you like, but you must first get hold of me, and take care that I do not run away from you!” The ancient philosopher knew the difference between the tenant and the tenement. When we have examined the house, have drawn up fairly accurate plans of it and know the materials of which it is built, even when we have some idea of the habits of the tenant, the man himself may elude us and remain largely unknown. He defies full analysis.

Not altogether unknown, however, for as a traveller in virgin forests, intent on studying the habits of Nature’s myriad family, can sometimes get near enough to take a moving-picture record of animal, bird, or insect life, so the psychologist has succeeded in laying hold of his fellow-man, and in some degree unveiling the mysterious workings of the soul. One of the most successful in this quest of the unknown in man was William James, the eminent professor of Harvard University. He pursued his studies and enquiries until he reached what he calls, “the constituents of the Me.” These he describes with masterly touch and with wealth of detail as “The Material Me, the Social Me, and the Spiritual Me.”

“The Material Me” comprises the body we inhabit, and the clothes we wear, for they indicate something of the personality within. As Polonius

would say, "The apparel oft proclaims the man." Then come other possessions that are part of our very selves, much as gold may be part of the miser. These include our home, our family, our worldly goods and adornments, and become, to use his own words, "with different degrees of intimacy, parts of our empirical selves."

"The Social Me" is a complex being that recognises and is recognised by others. It knows itself bound by certain ties to the rest of the race. It desires the good opinion of its fellows, and lives up to or falls beneath certain standards of honour and conduct, or is moved by the requirements of its environment.

"The Spiritual Me" is the entire collection of various states of consciousness, psychic faculties and dispositions. Our capacities for sensation, our emotions and desires, our intellectual processes and volitional decisions are all contained in this "me." "The very core and nucleus of ourself, as we know it," says the Professor, "the very sanctuary of our life, is the sense of activity which certain inner states possess."

We are thus led to see how wondrous is man. The problem of personality is as enthralling as it is difficult. The structure of the brain is known, but some of its processes baffle the most brilliant. The laws that govern habit, attention, imagination, and the association of ideas, perception and memory, are well understood, but there are deeps of which our soundings are yet unsatisfactory. Telepathy, thought-transference, clairvoyance, are facts that have been demonstrated but not explained. While the persistence of personality with which we deal in

the next chapter, is a problem of perennial interest. Just as man is more than body, so he is more than brain. Sir Oliver Lodge puts this with much cogency. "Superficially, nothing is easier than to claim that just as when the brain is damaged the memory fails, so when the brain is destroyed the memory ceases. The reasoning is so plausible and obvious, so within the reach of the meanest capacity, that those who use it against adversaries of any but the lowest intelligence might surely assume that it had already occurred to them and exhibited its weak point. The weak point in the argument is its tacit assumption that whatever is non-manifest is non-existent; that smoothing out the traces of guilt is equivalent to annihilating a crime; and that by destroying the mechanism of interaction between the spiritual and the material aspects of existence you must necessarily be destroying one or other of those aspects themselves. The brain is our present organ of thought. Granted; but it does not follow that brain generates or secretes thought, that inspiration is a physiological process. . . . Really we know too little about the way the brain *thinks*, if it can be properly said to think at all, to be justified in making any such assertion as that."

So far we have been simply strolling along the shore looking across the vast expanse of waters that lave the strand of time. The ocean stretches as far as eye can reach, here and there dazzlingly radiant in the midday sun; yonder, clouded over in patches with ominous shadows. How can we use those waters as a means of commerce with other souls like the vessels that bear their costly cargoes from port to port? In plainer speech, how can we turn from

the theoretical to the practical, and utilise the powers of personality for the highest ends? One phase of the subject is full of the deepest significance. We refer to that focussing of the individual life upon other lives that for want of a better term we call influence.

### THE POTENT POWER OF PERSONALITY

Truer word was never spoken than that of the Apostle who said, "None of us liveth unto himself." We are all bound to one another by subtle ties that none can break, for even if we would, we cannot be wholly unmindful of the sorrows and struggles of the multitudes about us, or at any rate, of those who are linked to us by the golden chains of affection. We are bound in one bundle of life. We cannot live wholly unto ourselves. The reason is not far to seek. It may be summed up in the one word we have used, Influence. It is a great, immeasurable, inexplicable force, streaming from our personality, and for good or ill it affects all who come within its sweep.

We need not pause to ask of what it is made up. It is more than the words we speak and the tone we employ. It is more than the work we do or the motive that moves us. It is ourself. It is the strange "I" that sits enthroned in the mind, that uses the body as the tenant uses a house, that looks out of the windows of the eye, speaks with the voice, but expresses itself in a hundred more subtle ways. It is the power of personality. Now for the sake of convenience let us make a broad distinction between two forms of influence. It may be conscious

or unconscious. The former is easily understood. We have all striven consciously to influence people. The salesman calls upon a customer with his samples of new season's goods. But he finds that either he has been forestalled or else his customer is reluctant to place any orders. Then the qualities of salesmanship are called into play. He invites comparison of his prices with others or directs attention to the quality of the goods he is offering. He appeals to the man's interests, and tries to show him that if he refuses to avail himself of the opportunity confronting him, then he is missing a splendid chance. But that is not all. The eager representative, anxious to do business, consciously strives to influence the man before him, using all the powers he can summon to overcome this opposition or reluctance. And when at last he books an order, he knows that he has been directing all the force of his personality upon the buyer.

A political contest is impending. There are rival candidates in the field, and they both enter into the struggle with all the earnestness they can summon. Go with this one who has set out personally to convince the people that he is their man. He meets with those who disagree with his views, and marshalling his facts, he does his best to overcome their antagonism with argument. There are some who will not satisfy him for whom they will vote, or, more probably, he finds that there is a large section of the constituency that seems to be smitten with apathy. It means everything to him to get returned; to them it means nothing. They simply do not mind who is the successful candidate. So he endeavours to awaken interest. Again, he points to the injus-

tices he has resolved to fight. He uses all his powers of persuasion and eloquence. But behind all he says and does, his personality counts more than anything. He has consciously tried to influence their views and their votes.

Every religious and social reformer who has the good of the people at heart provides further proof. Such a one may speak to them in public, but he does not end his labours with that. He enters the homes he wants to improve, or as Jesus did, he does his utmost to get as many points of contact with them as possible. He is consciously trying to lift them, to turn their minds to better things, to awaken disgust with the actual and desire for the ideal. So we might go on were there need. All three instances prove the power of the personal touch of life on life. It is a fact that needs no argument.

Just as there is this conscious influencing of another life, there may be the unconscious. A life may be lifted to a higher plane or the ways of evil may be the more readily and complacently trodden because of the power that another may bring to bear on it. Here is first-hand proof of it. In a certain business house there was a young man who wielded his powers of personality for the good of the whole staff. He was a Christian, but he never spoke to any of us of the faith he held dear. He simply lived it out from day to day. And it was most manifest in the insignificant things. He was invariably punctual in the morning. Whether the eyes of the manager were on him or not, it did not make any difference to the faithfulness with which he discharged his duties; there was no acceleration or slackening such as often

obtains in the average works or office. He seemed to move on a higher plane than most of us, and yet he was the most unassuming and approachable man on the staff. He changed the whole tone of that place. How? Just by the influence of his life. And men who never entered a place of worship or professed any interest in religion were swift to admit the splendid qualities of their fellow-worker. He left us to study for the ministry, and to-day he is the pastor of a church in the United States. But one wants to add that few of the advantages that come along the line of environment and heredity were his. It is not too much to say that, greatly as these things count, he had triumphed over tremendous disabilities, and by sheer grit and determination he had won his rightful place.

To that man many of us owed more than we could express, yet the strange thing is that it was several years afterwards that he heard how much he had done for his fellows. He was amazed. He had no idea of it. His influence had been wholly unconscious. What is true of him is true of us all. We cannot live among our fellow-men without the effects of our life making themselves felt. Yet the truth is realised not by talking of things in the abstract, but by cleaving to the concrete.

A gifted essayist says that "Scottish Presbyterianism in the abstract is held by outsiders to be a dry subject. Translated into the life of a Jeanie Deans, or into the characters and opinions of the worthies of Drumtochty, its flavour is appreciated by every palate." That is pre-eminently true of the subject under discussion.

## THE PERMANENCE OF THIS POWER

The effects of influence are permanent. They may be used for good or evil, but neutrality is impossible. We are constantly making it easier for others to do right, or harder; easier to tread the ways of purity and honour, or harder. That depends upon the personality from which the power streams forth, but that our influence is for good or evil is indisputable. There is a delightful spot in Derbyshire that one knows well. The river comes sweetly flowing down from the hills, fresh and sparkling, and it flows through meadows where the banks slope down carpeted with living green. The trees gracefully dip their branches to the waters, and the cattle stand knee deep and lazily lower their heads to drink. You follow the river through smiling lands where the flowers are fair and gay, and are reminded of the old word, "Everything shall live whither the river cometh." But on the other side of the road there is water of another kind. It filters through the limestone rock. Drip! drip! drip! slowly and sadly it falls, and it hardens, deadens, petrifies everything on which it is allowed to fall.

The one brings gladness and fertility; the other brings hardness and death. So it is with the influence we wield, for "none of us liveth unto himself." We are making the world better or worse by our presence in it. We leave behind us flowers that will rejoice the heart of the traveller by their fragrance, or thorns that will pierce his feet and make him less able to continue his quest for the good. Our passage may be a brief one, but the effects of it upon others none can measure. Some time ago we were sitting



on the shore of a south-coast resort looking idly over the sea, when far out, so that its form could only just be discerned, we saw a destroyer tearing along under full steam. The sea was like glass, but within a short time its surface had been completely changed, and great rollers were breaking at our feet. They came from that vessel that had taken only a few minutes to pass that point. Its passing had made itself felt for miles around. Or, to put it another way, you take a stone and fling it into the waters of a placid lake. It sinks in an instant, but from the place where it passed from sight the circles begin to widen and widen till at last the farthest marge of that lake has been reached.

So it is with the power we wield. The young prodigal may go into the far country thinking he can do what he likes, but in reality he is affecting the lives of many of whom he thinks nothing. The soul, on the other hand, striving to follow the good, the pure, the noble, is making it more possible for some other to believe in the worth of these things. Where there is life there is influence; where there is a personality there is power.

Another thing we shall do well to note is, that such effects are almost irrevocable. The wife and children of the criminal bear the stigma of his wrongdoing years after he has completed his sentence. The mischief wrought by the young roué to whom we alluded was not undone when he came back seeking his father's forgiveness. The shame of his evil ways, the disrepute into which he had brought religion, were ever-widening circles that even his penitence could not limit nor control.

“The evil that men do lives after them;  
The good is oft interred with their bones.”

Yet, happily, that is not always so. In fact, were it not presumption on our part to contradict Shakespeare, we might, while admitting the first statement, challenge the second. The good may be interred, but its influence is imperishable. None can read the story of Shaftesbury's life without feeling this. Unloved, uncared for, as a child he was committed to the charge of his mother's maid, who, being a deeply religious woman, yearned over the worse than motherless boy. She taught him the love of God as expressed in Christ's redemptive work, and storing his mind with the truths of the Scriptures, she also fired his soul with love for the neglected. The record of his after life is her memorial, more beautiful than sculptured stone or costly mausoleum. “She was the best friend I ever had,” he used to say, and that forms a more glowing and eloquent tribute to her worth and her work than the most wonderful oration that fell from the lips of Demosthenes.

Who can say that the good we attempt is buried in the tomb? It cannot be, for its influence abides. Florence Nightingale, braving the horrors of the Crimea, did splendid work for the wounded and the sick, but we doubt if her work, valuable as it was, was as precious as her influence among the men. If it be true that as her shadow fell across their pillows some of those fellows turned to kiss it, then one can well believe that the undaunted spirit of that saintly woman no less than her skill stirred the love and enthusiasm of the men she tended. Nor could it end there. Her chivalrous self-sacrifice,

her untiring devotion to duty, have impelled and nerved many another to suffer and serve for the sake of humanity. She has gone; her influence abides.

Henry Drummond gives us a most striking tribute to the power of Livingstone's personality. He says, "In the heart of Africa, among the great lakes, I have come across black men and women who remembered the only white man they ever saw before—David Livingstone; and as you cross his footsteps in that dark continent, men's faces light up as they speak of the kind Doctor who passed there years ago. They could not understand him; but they felt the love that beat in his heart."

It might have been the same had Livingstone been other than he was. Had he been cruel and unscrupulous as some other travellers have proved, had he exploited the natives, taking advantage of their ignorance, then the effect of his life would still have remained, but instead of being held in honour, his name would have been spoken with a curse. The effects of our life upon others make for good or evil; they lift up or drag down; but such power as we wield is permanent. "Men are gathered to their fathers," writes the late Bishop Creighton, "but their influence is even stronger after they are gone. Clearer and more distinct grow the lineaments of a character when the outward form has departed. Louder speaks the voice that is heard only by the inward ear."

### THE PERFECTING OF THE POWER

What we have said gives new meaning to the question, What is man? It makes us feel that life

is charged with greater responsibility than hitherto we may have realised. No matter how small our talent, how lonely our lot, we have this power in continual use; we can no more escape it than the shadow we cast when walking in the sun. How shall we use it aright? We may have doubts about many things. The problems of life and faith may perplex us, but as far as we can, we must emulate Tennyson's friend:

“He fought his doubts and gathered strength,  
He would not make his judgment blind,  
He faced the spectres of the mind  
And laid them: thus he came at length  
To find a stronger faith his own.”

But about this power with which we are endowed, there can be no doubt. We are influencing some one every day. We shall have to look into the faces of those who have come within the circle of our lives, for personality persists—theirs and ours. Such a fact must make us think.

We can show others the path of life and help them to tread the dusty ways of duty. By the very way in which we take life's reverses and bear the bludgeonings of fate, we may be of service to some other soul. We may do by our influence what we can do in no other way—neither by mouth or pen—cheer, inspire and strengthen a needier soul. Sin can be robbed of its glamour; sorrow can be robbed of its sting; the ways of life itself can be made more pleasant and tolerable by the way we use this power of personal influence. It is said that Britain ought naturally to be a land of almost perpetual snows. For eight months in the year the seas would be

frozen so that no ship could either leave or approach its ports. The land itself would be covered with only the sturdiest forms of vegetation, great woodland tracts through which wild beasts would roam, useful only for the furs they would provide. Farming would be impossible, for the land would be under the eternal snows, and the fruits of commerce no less than those of the earth would be few indeed. What is it that has saved it from such a condition? Thousands of miles away, beneath tropical suns, starts the Gulf Stream. It has gathered to its waters the warmth of the sun, and through the seas it makes its way for thousands of miles. It washes Britain's shores. It affects the whole climate of those isles. The severity of the Arctic winter is tempered, and the skies that stretch above are gracious. The valleys stand thick with corn. The sheep browse in the pastures. Its ports are open all the year round. And it is all due to the influence of the Gulf Stream.

There is a spiritual counterpart. The power of the Divine Spirit will flow into the life of every one who will open his being to the influences of God. His own life will be changed, the very outlook and atmosphere of the soul will be altered, and the effect of his life upon others will be measured by the power that his own personality has first received from God. Natural qualities of mind and heart are the possession of every man in some degree. The effect of thus realising that he may retard or help forward the life of another will make him feel that he cannot do without personal contact and relationship with God.

What possibilities this opens up for the humblest soul. If we cannot do some great thing in the

world by which we may be remembered by men, if we have neither time nor ability to carve for ourselves a niche in the chaste temple of Fame, we may yet enable some other soul to reach the goal; even we, by the power of our life, may be of service to the race and have some share in God's eternal purpose. A struggling musician in an obscure orchestra gave the world Rossini. A poor organist in Eisenach prepared the way for Sebastian Bach. The humble Scots woman, Margaret Ogilvie, so loved literature and fostered a liking for it in her son, that J. M. Barrie's soul was influenced in that direction. Nor need we limit the powers of personality to those who come after us, though their minds may be more plastic and their wills more easily shaped.

The great power we possess must be employed to change the atmosphere of the home, the business house, the state, so that "nobler modes of life, with sweeter manners, purer laws," may obtain. This is finely shown in Jerome's magnificent story of "The Third Floor Back." He describes the advent of a stranger to a third-rate boarding house in Bloomsbury, where a lot of coarse-minded people lived. Some were manifestly living on their wits, and the morals of the party were almost as bad as their manners. The landlady herself was cunning and an adept at cheating her boarders, while they set themselves out to gain the advantage of her and of each other. But the stranger had been there only a couple of months when the whole tone of the place was altered. Little decencies that had been entirely foreign to the daily life of the establishment began to manifest themselves. The stranger treated these people as ladies and gentlemen, and the boarders

seemed bent on trying to live up to his good opinion, while two shady financiers suddenly acquired a taste for honesty that was likely to cost them a good deal in the course of the year. Our interest is aroused, however, in a young girl who was being urged by her parents to marry not for love but for money. The man was a retired bookmaker, rich, but loathsome, and the girl was regarded by the stranger as a noble-souled young woman, something midway between Flora Macdonald and Joan of Arc. He wished her the joy of love—of a happy marriage, and the girl winced at his words. “Love and marriage are not always the same thing,” she said. “Not always,” agreed the stranger, “but in your case they will be one.” She blurted out the truth; she was going to marry not her lover, but this man who had money and could give her the things that money could buy. She wanted to shock her questioner, but he looked into her very soul as he said, “You will not marry him!” “Who will stop me?” she cried angrily. “Your Better Self! There are those whose Better Self lies slain by their own hand and troubles them no more. But yours, my child, you have let it grow too strong; it will ever be your master. You must obey. Flee from it and it will follow you; you cannot escape it. Insult it and it will chastise you with burning shame and stinging self-reproach from day to day.” The sternness faded from the beautiful face, the tenderness crept back. “You will marry your lover. With him you will walk the way of sunlight and of shadow.” And the girl, looking up into the strong, calm face, knew that the power of resisting her Better Self had passed away from her for ever.

This was the power of personality in that sordid boarding-house. It will be the same in some degree everywhere where the soul is open to the light and love of God's Spirit. It comes through the death of the selfish life, the opening of the soul to the might of the Master Personality, Christ. It is thus that the world can be made better. At the same time, the soul itself is shaped, manhood and womanhood are moulded into fairer form and personality is brought on the way to ultimate perfecting, which is the goal of redemption. "Governments, like clocks," says William Penn, "go from the motion men give them. Let men be good and the government cannot be bad; if it be ill they will cure it. But if men be bad, let the government be ever so good they will warp and spoil it to their turn." Once let a man realise that he is worth so much to God and to mankind, and life will become a grander and a nobler thing, and through the mists of doubt that rise about the human soul, one star will shine brightly to be his cheer and guide: his personality can tell for good!

This is but the beginning of things. Personality persists. Man is immortal. Life beyond the grave shall be for the redeemed a grander and more glorious thing than ever the mind of man has conceived.

"Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of eternity,  
Until death tramples it to fragments. Die  
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek."

The depths of man's personality remain unplumbed,  
the wonders of his soul are but faintly shadowed



forth, but eternity will complete the work that time has begun, redemption will set the coping-stone upon the work of creation to him that believeth.

“. . . Follow the Christ, the King.  
Live pure, speak true, right wrong!  
Follow the King,  
Else, wherefore born?”

## XI

### THE PROBLEM OF IMMORTALITY

WE were standing on the platform of a small railroad station one night, when the quiet was broken by a distant shriek. A few moments later an express tore along like a thing possessed, and was swiftly swallowed up in the abysmal gloom of the tunnel just beyond. The deep red glow of the tail-lights vanished, and as we looked, there was nothing but the yawning tunnel mouth from which swirled eddying clouds of smoke; nothing but that and—silence! For a moment the illusion was almost complete. It was as though some gigantic monster had swallowed the train and its living freight, and there it lay with evil fumes pouring from its mouth waiting for other victims. Then we saw the resemblance between that train and man's swift passing from the seen to the unseen, from light to darkness, from time to eternity. And that black abyss became like the gaping grave; the silence of both was akin.

Yet we need not be morbid when we turn to this problem of immortality. In trying to probe some of its mystery it is only that with firmer grip we may lay hold of the mighty hopes that make us men. And this notwithstanding the statement of Mr. J. Arthur Hill that the question of immortality has ceased to receive much attention. "It can hardly be denied," he says, "that though individual sur-

vival of bodily death remains part of the supposed belief of Christian churches, it has ceased to be part of the living faith of the average religious man. Clergymen shy at discussing it; they have no vital belief in it themselves."

For once this eminent writer is wrong. Speaking for ourselves we hold to the fact of the immortality of man's soul with the utmost tenacity. And when he asserts that it has ceased to be part of the living faith of people, we have only to remind him that the war changed that supposed indifference. To-day, both in the church and outside, there is a deeper interest in the life beyond than ever before. The fact that a book like "Raymond," by Sir Oliver Lodge, went through six editions in two months, coupled with the fact that never did Spiritualism, crystal-gazing, and enquiry into the occult, have so many devotees, proves the point. The truth is, we have been impelled to turn anew to the hope of immortality. What is that hope and on what is it based? What do we know, or what can we know of the soul when once it has passed like that express, into the dark tunnel of death?

#### IMMORTALITY IS UNIVERSALLY DESIRED BY THE HUMAN HEART

Though we may admit that statement, is there any reality to satisfy the desire, or is it simply a fond hope that man cherishes that he is more than mortal? There is such a thing as the wish being father to the thought, and we cannot help wondering if that is the case here. Far back in the dim dawn of history, man's longing for a life beyond the grave

can be traced. It is one of the primitive instincts of the race. Professor Frazer, in the "Golden Bough," assures us that every people has its own beliefs about the matter, and in their religious rites and their burial customs these may be seen.

The Egyptians, in common with even more ancient peoples, had a clear conception of life beyond the vale, and in the elaborate tombs they built for their rulers, tombs like the Pyramids, as well as in the resting-places of lesser luminaries, the evidence of their belief in immortality is overwhelming. The bodies of the departed were carefully embalmed as though the certainty of resurrection or of the welfare of the soul depended on the preservation of the remains, and food, money, and weapons were also placed with them that the needs of the soul might be supplied.

The Hindu philosophy plainly taught the continuance of life, though the idea is rather that the soul is merged in the great ocean of being as the raindrop is swallowed up in the rolling seas. While the Greeks, although again they expressed the fact differently, were convinced that when the dread shears severed the thread of this life, the soul still lived somewhere in the abode of the shades.

But more interesting is the fact that, as every reader of the Old Testament knows, while the Hebrews dreaded death as an evil thing, they desired immortality as the chief good, and yet, here is a fact that has often been overlooked: the Jewish mind, though it had been wonderfully enlightened, and had grasped religious truth in a singular way, had no clear and definite doctrine of immortality such as that which the Christian holds to-day.

“Man goeth to his long home”—that was the thought that obsessed them. It was certain that life came to an end, but there their certainty ended as the solid land is seen to end where the rocky promontory juts out into the shimmering waters of the sea. They had glimpses of the truth. The Psalmist says, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol.” But is that anything more than a fond hope that the soul will live again? Their idea was that the dead, quitting this world, went down to Sheol, the abode of the shades in the underworld, and there, in dimness and yet with inextinguishable desire, the soul remained till somehow or some time deliverance should come. No clear vision of the truth was theirs.

Is the Christian any surer of his ground, or have we to put his beliefs on the same plane as these who have long since gone, or that of the Red Indian with his dream of the happy hunting-grounds kept somewhere for faithful warriors? The answer of the agnostic is in the affirmative. The answer of the guilty soul, like that of Macbeth, who dreads the possibility that he may meet again the man he has sinned against, is that this life ends all:

“. . . Out, out brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more.”

Yet that is not the feeling of the universal heart. It has its dread of the unknown, but it also has a desire to pierce the veil that hangs shimmering with light or gloomy with mystery between man and his great morrow.

The oft-related story of Edwin of Northumbria

is proof. Some Christian missionaries stood in the court of the ancient king. The light of the burning torches illumines the faces of his warriors as the message is proclaimed. And one can almost feel the thrill that passes through these men as they hear of One who has vanquished the power of death, and rent asunder the veil of the future. Then as the story ends, an old warrior, whose face is scarred with many a conflict, and possibly whose son has fallen on some sanguinary field, speaks. "Man is like a bird flying through yonder window into this hall. It comes from the darkness without. It tarries a brief space in the light and warmth; and then it flies forth again into the dark beyond. Can this new religion tell us whither the soul goes when once it speeds forth through the window of death?"

The old man speaks for us. That is just the point: Can Christianity tell us definitely about immortality, or is the idea that man is more than mortal merely a delusion? We can say without hesitation that it is more than a hope; it is a divinely-implanted instinct. The soul rightly rebels against the idea that death ends everything. In his lament for his friend, Tennyson describes himself as waiting for the coming of the vessel that bears the loved remains home, and he says with heart-haunting pathos, "Is this the end of all my care? Is this the end?" We cannot believe that all the divine plans end in dust and ashes, or that man who is the crown of creation is of no more account than the beast that perishes. His life's flame is not simply like a candle in the wind, extinguished by the rude gusts of accident or disease. He has been loved and redeemed by the sacrifice of God Himself. So we can surely

say that this instinct has been implanted in his heart by his Eternal Maker.

We admit that the desire may be forgotten for a time, that it may be put away in the lumber-room of the soul till the dust of indifference covers it from sight. But some day he will discover it again. It is always there. In one of Ralph Connor's stories of the West, he tells of a young man, the son of an old Scots minister. He has been living a fast life out there, far from the restraints of home. And after a wild drinking bout in which he has been accidentally shot, he lies waiting for the end that he knows is not far off. The minister has been helping the lad to find peace, when, to his surprise, Bruce says, "I know heaven is a good place—I believe it all—always did—talked rot—you'll forgive me that!" Yes, in spite of his evil ways and apparent atheism, somewhere in the recesses of his soul was a belief in immortality and a reverence for the things against which he had so often spoken. It is true of most of us. Man holds that there is more than the blackness of the tomb or submergence in the dark river of Lethe. God set both the hope and the instinct there. And so, wistfully or woefully, he turns his wondering eyes to the horizon to which he presses on, guessing what is beyond the sunset. In the plaintive words of Longfellow, the whole argument is concisely summed up:

"That even in savage bosoms  
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,  
For the good they comprehend not;  
That the feeble hands and helpless  
Groping blindly in the darkness,  
Touch God's right hand in that darkness."

In solemn yet silent witness to the fact of man's instinctive belief in the soul's survival, even the casual observer sees that in yon quiet churchyard, where the ivied tower keeps watch over the graves, the lichen-covered stones are set towards the east whence comes the dawn of day.

#### IMMORTALITY IS DEMANDED BY REASON

As rational beings, we cannot be blind to the incompleteness of life as we know it. If this life ended all, it would be to most of us a mockery at best. We form plans that do not come to fruition. The larger they are, the worthier their purpose, the surer it seems to be that we shall never see them complete. For one thing, life is not long enough to accomplish all we wish. Time speeds by with the winged feet of Mercury, and while we are learning to use our talents or training our powers to compass the ends on which we have set our hearts, we find that we are too old to complete what we have well begun.

Again, if this were the end of everything, the experiences of life with all the trying lessons that we have to learn would be only refined torture. We have to attend the school of experience. It is only under the stern discipline of daily happenings that some of us learn anything. But if there is nothing to be gained from those lessons, if there is no meaning in the trials through which we pass, and no good to compensate us for all we have to endure, then all we have been taught of the wisdom and love of God is another delusion. The heart at



its best can never believe that. He loves His children, and there must be some purpose in what He permits. You would never keep the growing boy chained to his desk if you knew for certain that he would never pass his fifteenth year owing to some serious physical defect. You would let him read any book he liked, or roam fancy free under the blue vault, culling the flowers of the field or listening to the voice of Nature so that all possible joy might be his for that brief span. But in the ordinary way you take quite a different course. In spite of spirited protests, though his only interests seem to centre in the sports field or in some hobby, you persistently strive to keep him to his work of preparation for the future. His future—then there is one? In all human probability, yes. One day, the boy will be a man. He will have to take his place in the world's arena, and it is your fondest wish for that boy that he may be equipped and found fitted to play his part worthily. Then that is the reason which justifies you in making the lad learn lessons he dislikes and in which he sees very little value.

What is true of the human parent is true of God. Not only would it be an appalling waste of energy, but positive cruelty to make men and women battle for years against adverse circumstances if there were no way out, and no spiritual benefit to be derived from such suffering. It would be unworthy of God to set within the heart a desire for immortal fellowship with the Divine if such could never be attained; and to complete life, there must be another world for the soul beyond this.

But the facts of life seem yet to deny this. We

think of the "Stickit Minister" of whom Crockett writes. Feeling himself called to the ministry, he set out to gain a college training that would fit him for his work. For years he worked under his tutors, grappling with profound subjects that made him feel he was being carried out of his depth. At last, with credit to himself and to his professors, he finished his course. But alas! for the frailty of human hopes. He tried again and again to find some congregation to which he might impart the precious things his soul cherished. They would have none of him. All he received from any man was that pity that is galling to any man with a vestige of self-respect. And thus there was an end to his hopes if no hope for his end. Unfitted for business, unsuited for commerce or agriculture, he was one of the world's misfits, to be cast as rubbish to the void. We have all felt as he must have done. We try humbly to learn the lessons of life set by the invisible hand of the great Master. But even while we blunderingly spell out the long words we but partly understand, the shadows fall, the light fades, and the darkness of death is upon us.

Life does seem incomplete. One heard of a young doctor who had carried all before him in the schools, and for whom his friends foretold a great future. But tending a poor wreck carried from the streets to one of our hospitals, that doctor contracted a loathsome disease from which the man was suffering, and while that broken wretch recovered, the gifted young physician died in the flush of his early manhood. More poignant still is the loss of our gallant young kinsmen. Why should those young lives have been laid in swathes by the scythe of the dread Reaper? The world is poorer for their passing,

while many a fond hope lies trampled beneath the heel of militarism. We loved them so well, and expected so much of them. They were to do more for their fellows than ever we had done. Some of us stinted ourselves to give them a good start, yea, almost beggared ourselves to give them an education. And now, all the years of care lavished upon them in infancy and youth, all our prayers, all our love, have gone for nothing. The aged who looked on those young arms as their support when strength should fail are left desolate. The maiden denied her dream of wedded happiness is doomed to perpetual regret. Without immortality, then there is no meaning in all these things, except a grim witness to the incompleteness of life as we know it.

The inequalities of life afford another reason why this life should not be all. It is one of the recurring perplexities that the thoughtful man meets that so many wrongs are done without any adequate justice being meted out to the wrongdoer. The good are compelled to suffer, or the innocent are grievously injured, and yet the heavens seem as brass when the divine justice is invoked, while no punishment that man can devise can meet some of the crimes perpetrated by man's inhumanity. Certainly, the evils cannot be undone.

If there be no beyond, then who shall avenge the wrongs of the dispossessed, the aged, and those who have suffered injustice? Reason demands that there should be some reparation. And yet at the same time it knows that there can be none for some. Cash cannot compensate! There are some wrongs that no man can right. The next life must in common justice give what this life can never give.

Nor is that all. There are some to whom the common decencies of life seem denied. The forlorn and the outcast, the respectable poor and the honestly struggling, present another phase of the problem. And what shall we say of those who, as far as we can see, have been denied a chance of making the best of themselves even though they are far above the poverty-line? You cannot dismiss difficulties like these with an airy wave of the hand. One knew a man who might have made his way in the musical profession had not Providence ordained that he should be the sole support of a widowed mother and an invalid sister. There was another who had fine ambitions and great ideals, but whose place gave him little scope, for he was penned behind a counter. Here is a woman who has yearned for a home of her own, but she had to sacrifice her life to nursing her aged father, and now, when the load is lifted, she is getting old. Her cheeks are faded, her hair is streaked with grey, and the bloom of youth has fled.

Does it seem quite fair that the door of opportunity that swings on well-oiled hinges for some should be fast-barred against others, if we are all God's children? It is not simply a question of ability; it certainly is not always a question of character. These are inequalities of life, which, like its incompleteness, make us feel that in spite of any compensations that may come on earth, there is still a debit balance.

What both reason and instinct require has been provided by the Good Father, for in Jesus Christ the race may enter into eternal fellowship with its Maker. What was before veiled has now been

revealed. The dividing curtain is rent, like that of the Temple, from top to bottom, and through faith in Him the old ugly spectre of death is vanquished and the tomb robbed of its terrors for all time.

#### IMMORTALITY IS DEMONSTRATED BY JESUS CHRIST

Our Lord's life and teaching are intelligible to us only if man is immortal. He set human life in the light of eternity. He interpreted its darkest happenings by referring them to their divine purpose. He not only showed to men in wonderful word-pictures, radiant with heavenly colours, the kind of life they were meant to live, but He assured them that every sad experience piercing the heart like an arrow had its meaning. For who like He takes the dart from the wound and with His own lips sucks the poison therefrom? So men have found a new courage and confidence as they live in the light of that life. But He did more than hint at a life beyond this. He told His disciples that in fellowship with Him they should not see death, but should be victorious over the grave. The aim of the Father was that they might enter into a glorious life of ceaseless progress and unbroken fellowship with Him, and the gloomy portals of death would be to them only the gate of a new glad life beyond. But some will say, granting this is so, Christ left us with many questions still unanswered. That is true. There are many things we would have liked to ask Him before He was received up out of His disciples' sight. Why did He not tell us more? For two reasons. One is that undue anticipation of the future may greatly disturb the present. Were we

constantly to dwell on the future state of the blessed, we might be unfitted to do our part in the life that now is. We once promised to take a little child to the Zoo. She had long wanted to go, and this was to be her birthday celebration. But it was some weeks off. And as we saw how the days were being counted, and how the little mind was obsessed with this one idea, we felt guilty of a mild form of cruelty. Then we understood why the Master did not tell us all there is to know of the life on the other side. He gave us enough to assure us of the fact, and enough to kindle desire and arouse interest. This is the other reason to which we referred: He reminds us that this life is the ante-chamber of the other, and that here we are shaping character so that we may be fitted for the fuller life to come.

We know how zest and interest die when once we feel that there is nothing more to live for here. But if we realise that there are yet loftier heights to scale, greater goals to reach, all that is best in us responds. Life is stimulated to fuller activity, and the soul is blessed. With what skilful hand does the practised novelist keep our interest to the last chapter! Sometimes we want to read the last chapter at once to find out how things end. But we know that the fullest enjoyment of the story will be ours only as we patiently pass to the conclusion. Yet is it not true that we may intelligently anticipate the trend of events? So it is with the life that runs across the vale of gloom and the river of death. We can deduce some facts that will help us to solve part of the problem of immortality.

The Scriptures have been wrested to our hurt. Some of our hymns have also led humanity astray.

They have depicted the life immortal as something other than real life—a kind of trance-like state or a dreamless slumber. Or, putting into sober prose some poetic description of the redeemed, they have made that life appear so unnatural that it is a weariness to the flesh even to contemplate.

Is that the kind of life that Christ, the Lord of life, would hold out to His friends as the supreme goal of mankind? Not if His life is any guide! Life for us here is what? Action, joyous personal living, in fullest correspondence with our environment. It is rich with loving intercourse with our dear ones, and best of all, it is crowned with the smile of God our Father. Thus it stands to reason that if the life to come is truly life, it will be as rich, as personal, as full of joyous activity and satisfaction as that which, under the divine blessing, we can possibly know here.

There are some questions that need to be faced. What of the idea of sleeping? Granted that Jesus spoke of the maiden as being asleep, when her parents said she was dead, that is not an insuperable difficulty. There is a similarity between the sleep of the night and that of death, especially when the wearied close their eyes. Yet it is a fact that we sleep to wake. Our jaded powers are refreshed as we turn aside from the toils of the day. And when the morning comes, as sure it must, we shall open our eyes in the fulness of the divine day, just as glad to be alive then, in that world of larger scope, as we are on a morning here in Spring. The fact is, we have little warrant for supposing that the dead pass from us into a state of unconscious existence. That memorable day when the dying thief on the

cross looked into the pitying eyes of the Good Master, his repentant heart was assured that, that very day, he would enter the gates of Paradise with Him whom in his heart he revered. "This day"—there is no long, dreamless period there. Or take that case where the Sadducees were trying to entrap Jesus about the supposed woman with seven husbands. The whole point of His reply is that there is no ghostly existence such as the Sadducees suggested, but a life free from the shackles of the flesh as well as those of human relationships. Again, there is His telling word about God being the God not of the dead, but of the living! Hamlet's famous philosophy with its fear of waking in the other world is not to be ranked with the plain teaching of Christ that those who trust in Him shall never see death.

But how can there be life and personal existence if the body be destroyed, or how can consciousness persist if the mind is no longer in existence? It is true, as Paul says, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven." Yet he also asserts that "if there is a natural body there is also a spiritual body." We are not ghostly spirits in the new life, but as just as truly living as we are here, yea more, for all the hampering bonds of the body shall be cast aside at death. Paul was combating the Gnostic idea that the body was simply of no account. This theory was a dangerous one in that day, for it meant that some, by asceticism of the severest type, were so weakening the body that they could not possibly discharge the duties that life lays on every man, and on the religious man most of all. But there were others who plunged into all manner of vile abuse, steeping the flesh in grossest sin, and



pleading as their justification that as the body was purely a temporary thing, it did not matter how they indulged the sins of the flesh so long as they kept the spirit pure—as though that were possible! When the Apostle uses the word “natural” he does not mean that it is a body made of *pseuche*, but adapted to the natural life. So when he says there is a spiritual body, he is thinking of a body adapted to the life of the *pneuma*—the spirit. It may be that we are here building up a spiritual counterpart of our body. But whatever our speculations, we have this fact on which we may rely: just as God prepared a body for our spirit for the life here, He will prepare a body that will be the medium through which the life of the spirit can be expressed in the life beyond. And though the mind may be injured by accident or disease, that does not involve the extinction of personality, though the power of personality may be curtailed. Let us make this clear in a simple analogy. A violinist must have an instrument through which to express his powers. He may possess skill amounting to genius, but unless the violin be available it is as though he had no such power, although, strictly speaking, his talent exists independently of the instrument itself. So it is of the soul of man. It expresses itself through the mind, but it is not identical with the mind. And though as in the one case you might destroy the violin without destroying the skill of the violinist, so you might destroy the mind without affecting the continuance of the personality.

Personality does persist. But will it persist in recognisable form so that we shall know our dear ones on the other side, those whom we “have loved

long since and lost awhile?" Undoubtedly! George Macdonald asks the question with more force than elegance, "Shall we be greater fools in Paradise than we are here?" Of course we shall know one another. It would not be Paradise unless we could there knit up some of the ties that made life here so sweet, nor could that life be perfectly happy for us if we were to roam the streets of the New Jerusalem without seeing a face we love. It would be like staying in a boarding-house where we have to be polite or even friendly with people we have never seen before, while all the time we are "longing for our ain folk!" Yet, if the bodily form is changed, how can recognition be possible? We are not dependent wholly upon bodily form for recognition even here. We recognise the footstep of a friend as he passes our window, or the tones of his voice. We know his handwriting, or even if we hear one of his letters read without seeing the writing, there is that subtle thing called "style" that reveals the man we know. But surely there is something more subtle still. One knew a mother who went down to the wharf to welcome her son who was returning from America. He was only a youth when he went, and some twenty years had elapsed. No photographs had passed between them, for there had been some kind of estrangement for a long time. But all that was over, and the son was coming home. Would they recognise one another? He was now a grown, bearded man, not the stripling who went away. The mother who had passed through many a trial was no longer young, and the frosts of premature age had touched her hair with white. There she stood by the gangway, knowing somehow that

she would meet her boy. Incredible though it may seem, the mother recognised a man coming towards her. Was it the walk, the build? That could hardly be. But she knew him, and smiled as he drew nearer. He went right up to her and greeting her with that dear word, Mother! they embraced. "But how did you know me?" she asked. "I don't know," came the reply, "unless it was your smile." It may have been something even more elusive than the smile—that deep sympathy that binds two souls together though the ways of life may widen. And what if in that new life those bonds be stronger still? At any rate identity is not lost, and personality persists in spite of change. We know that our physical bodies are changing constantly, and that the body we inhabit to-day is not the one we had a few years ago. We have had several different soul-houses in our lifetime, and yet we are the same. The man of ninety may weary you by his narrative of what he did when he was a boy. But he will impress you with the fact that he is conscious of himself as the same living personality. We can recall things that happened to us twenty or thirty years ago, and we know that we and no one else were the persons affected. To bring it still nearer, sometimes, weary with our work, we lay it aside at night and take it up again in the morning just where we left off although we have slept in the interval. So we will lay down our life-work in the evening of death and wake to take it up next morning in the Beyond—and yet we shall be the same men and women. If personality persists, and identity is retained, recognition is certain.

Then if we are still the same, what change can

there be? The same answer holds good: we change with the years, yet we are still the same persons. And when the soul passes at death from the ante-chamber of earth to the presence of the King, it is through the redeeming grace of Christ that the work will be completed. The great heroes of faith, who have served their day and generation, may leave behind them gaps which it is difficult to fill, while our loved ones who have been taken from us make the sense of loss even more acute, but they are not dead. Their battle is over and the meed of the conqueror is theirs. They have been called to fuller service in the presence of their King. And their passing from the home on earth to the Father's House is not a passing to darkness and gloom, nor even to a sleep of tranquil dreamlessness. Home connotes more than that. It means love, and life, and light. Recall the famous old war song of the American Republic. The words may be gruesome, but their significance is glorious:

"John Brown's body lies a-moulding in the grave,  
But his soul goes marching on!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!"

So it is with the souls of the righteous who die in Christ. They see the King in His beauty, and they see Him now! There is no weary waiting in the Place of Shades. There is no desolate wandering in Sheol. If Christ's word is to be trusted—and it is!—then His word of comfort to the dying malefactor at His side, the act of repentance carrying his sins away as the winds take the ripe leaves of Autumn from the branches, is a word of comfort to every enquiring soul, "This day thou shalt be with

Me in Paradise." You will find correct theology as well as an inspiring thought on that old monument in St. Paul's Cathedral, in London, "Through the gates of death we pass to our joyful resurrection." And the simple lay of Whittier falls on the arid soul like dew upon the parched soil:

"That death seems but a covered way  
Which opens into light,  
Wherein no blinded child can stray  
Beyond the Father's sight."

How this grips the soul! We have our dear fore-runners who, like Joshua and Caleb of old, have gone before us to spy out the land. And shall we disappoint them, as they look for the re-union with those they have loved on earth? Never! Let us live by faith in Christ who alone throws open the portal of life, so that we too may one day stand in His presence, redeemed and complete. Yea, set this hope before you that it may blaze like a star in the darkest night, so that when the call comes for us, we too, with joyous feet like the Wise Men of old, may be guided into the presence of Him whom to know is life eternal.

THE END



















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